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MEZZOTINT

When George Clapshaw was appointed Governor of the Crown Colony of Assumption shortly after the war, he found this delightful island very much under the thumb of the descendants of the original French planters. George and his forceful wife come hard up against the colour bar, a reactionary Frenchman, owner of the local newspaper, and the possibility of inadequate income-tax returns by the white planters. Appointing as acting Attorney-General a brilliant barrister, who happens to be an octoroon, George puts the cat properly among the pigeons. The situation also includes two treasure-hunters, one of whom is a fanatic of Moral Rearmament, the island's Roman Catholic bishop, and a mezzotint of Stoke Poges churchyard which has been presented to the new school by the British Council.

BY COMPTON MACKENZIE

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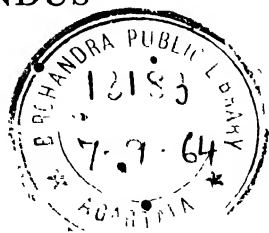
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THE ENCHANTED ISLAND
THE NAUGHTYMOBILE
THE FAIRY IN THE WINDOW BOX
THE STAIRS THAT KEPT ON
GOING DOWN

MEZZOTINT

A Novel by
Compton Mackenzie

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To

Thelma Cazalet-Keir & David Keir,
affectionately

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Prelude

MADAME PERRIER put back into its envelope the letter she had been reading and sat upright in a high cane-seated chair, the gilded arms and back of which were so dim and tarnished after a century in the tropics as scarcely to be recognizable for gilt any longer. The letter lay upon her lap; an onlooker might have compared this pale aristocratic woman of fifty to a falcon contemplating the feathers that remained of the bird on which it had swooped.

The room in which Madame Perrier sat was large and lofty with four french-windows screened by venetian blinds against the glitter of the sea from the westering sun. Presently she rose and walked across the faded Aubusson carpet to go out on the verandah and stand there watching the boat of the Creole postman being rowed in toward the tumbledown jetty on Assumption from which her own little island was separated by nearly a mile of water, deep jade-green for most of the day but at this hour before sunset sheened with gold. L'Enfant Perdu was the name of Madame Perrier's own little island over whose three hundred acres of coconut-palms together with large plantations on Assumption itself she had ruled since her husband's death ten years before. As a descendant of the French planters to whom the British Government had paid an almost obsequious respect ever since L'Île de l'Assomption, almost on the Equator in the middle of the South Atlantic, had been captured during the Napoleonic wars, Madame Perrier felt as sure of herself as a marquise in the reign of Louis XV. When

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she re-entered the salon from the verandah this ivory-cheeked slim aquiline woman sat herself down to read through the rest of the mail which had been brought by the *Andalusia*. A Royal Mail liner bound for Buenos Aires stopped once in three voyages off Belair, the port of Assumption, and similarly once in three voyages when homeward bound. So Madame Perrier's mail was an accumulation of six weeks.

An hour later Violette, one of the Creole maids, came in with the lamps and Madame Perrier told her to send a message to Monsieur Dumont that she wanted to see him. Speaking in the curious debased French that the Assomptionnois had used since the days of slavery, she went on to ask if the boat had gone across to wait for Mademoiselle. Yes, the boat had left five minutes ago, but Mademoiselle had said that she should not be at the jetty before seven o'clock; there was plenty of time. Violette's dark eyes flashed reassuringly. She was a handsome girl, hardly darker than many Neapolitans.

"Good evening, Dumont," Madame Perrier said when her *régisseur* arrived, and added graciously, "you can be seated."

Claude Dumont bowed and sat down in one of the tarnished gilt chairs. He was a man of about sixty with grey hair and a heavy grey moustache whose florid complexion would have become a Wiltshire farmer, in spite of the fact that his mother—dead nearly twenty years ago—had been very dark. At least five-sixths of the population of Assumption were descended from the slaves of the French planters before emancipation, but there was a large admixture of white blood and the complexions varied from milkiest *café au lait* to jet black, the phenomenon of one or the other being apparently completely fortuitous.

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"I want you to read this letter, Dumont," Madame Perrier told her steward.

When the latter looked at the address on the envelope he stiffened abruptly.

"To Mademoiselle?"

"To Mademoiselle, yes, from your son Jules. Pray read what he has to say."

Claude Dumont drew the letter from its envelope with obvious embarrassment.

"Do you really wish me to read it, Madame?" he asked.

"Do I have to repeat myself?"

The steward took out the letter.

22 Harcourt Road, W. 14.

My dear Mademoiselle Yvonne,

I wonder when you will get this letter. It's really disgraceful that the mails from Assumption should be so irregular. I suppose one day the people here will wake up to the fact that this is a British Crown Colony which deserves a little consideration.

I am glad now that I decided to come to the Hospital instead of going to Cambridge after I left school. I can live much more cheaply as a medical student and although I know my father would deny himself anything to give me the chance he never had as a young man I feel happier this way. When I come back to the Island as a doctor, I hope in five years' time, you'll be twenty-two. Will you still be Mademoiselle Yvonne Perrier? I hardly dare hope that you will, and yet when we said good-bye last August I did dare to hope that you might. I know how far from Paradise Assumption really is, but in London it seems like Paradise, and when I listen at night to the traffic along Hammer-smith Road I try to fancy that it is the ocean surf on our beaches.

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I went to see The Tempest the day before yesterday and when I heard Ariel singing "Come unto these yellow sands" I was on the point of weeping! I wish we could have met sometimes when you were at school in Lausanne. When you go to Paris this autumn perhaps I shall be able to save enough to cross the Channel for a week. Will you write and say if that would give you pleasure? I'm afraid this is a very dull letter but I have nothing to write about my work at the Hospital that would interest you, and if I write about my dreams they may not interest you any longer. It seems a hundred years since I waved good-bye from the deck of the Andalusia to a lot of white butterflies fluttering along the quay at Belair and wondered if one of them was your handkerchief.

Your loving friend of childhood and your respectful admirer of to-day,

Jules Dumont

"I do not think the boy intends any disrespect, Madame," said the father as he handed the letter back.

"You do not find it disrespectful to discuss marriage with Mademoiselle? You do not find it presumptuous to suggest a meeting with Mademoiselle in Paris? *Vraiment, Dumont, vous répondez en dépit de bon sens et vous n'êtes pas tellement sot.*"

There was a contemptuous sibilance in that last word which would be lost in English.

The steward bowed his head.

"It was perhaps a little indiscreet."

"Indiscreet?" Madame Perrier echoed in sarcastic astonishment. "Since when did the son of my *régisseur* suppose that presumptuousness was indiscretion? I will tell you, Dumont. It was when you were foolish enough to send him to school in England, and to a Protestant school at that. And what is this nonsense about coming

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back to the island as a doctor? Surely you, an Assomptionnois must know, that we should never tolerate that."

"I think, Madame, that my son hopes for an official position as a medical officer of the Government," the steward told her.

"Oh, so that is what he hopes," Madame Perrier murmured. "I see. Well, Dumont, take my advice and do not waste your money on such aspirations. It may have been a mistake on my part to pay you as much as I do because it has obviously put into your head ideas that you are old enough to know are quite ridiculous. If your son insists on becoming a doctor he must become a doctor in England or at any rate somewhere else than Assumption. I advise you to let him know this as soon as possible. You should let him know at the same time that his letter to Mademoiselle has been read by me and that only because you have been so long in my service I am not going to dismiss you. If he ever writes again to Mademoiselle you will be instantly dismissed and I do not think you would find it easy to obtain another post here. That is all I have to tell you, Dumont."

Madame Perrier's steward bowed and withdrew from the salon. It was half an hour later when her daughter came in. Yvonne Perrier was only just seventeen but there was no trace of gauche adolescence left, and although she was to be "finished" by a year in Paris there was not the least apparent need for such a process. She was petite with lustrous deep brown eyes, a small straight nose instead of her mother's aquiline, cheeks like young ivory, a slim bow of a mouth and a cloud of dark hair. In her white tennis-frock in the lamplight of this old sun-dried salon she seemed like a freshly gathered flower.

"It was quite an amusing party, *maman*. But really I

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do think old Madame Bergerot takes too much upon herself. Oh yes, she asked when you were coming and when I told her you were not coming she raised those hideously black eyebrows of hers. Really, *maman*, if Madame Bergerot is going to be surprised because I go to a tennis-party at Government House unaccompanied by a duenna . . .”

“Perhaps Madame Bergerot was right to be surprised,” Madame Perrier interrupted sharply.

“*Maman*, what do you mean?”

“I am beginning to feel that I have had more confidence in your discretion than it deserves.”

“But really, *maman*, Government House was every bit as dull as it usually is.”

“I am not talking about Government House. I am talking about young Jules Dumont. You must have given him a great deal of encouragement for him to write you a letter like this.”

Madame Perrier passed the letter from England to her daughter.

As Yvonne read it a disdainful frown deepened.

“I don’t know why he should suppose that I would welcome a visit from him in Paris,” she said scornfully.

“You are sure you did not give him any encouragement last summer?”

“Encouragement, *maman*? Encouragement to suppose that I was interested in *him*? You must have very strange notions about me.”

Yvonne tore the letter into little pieces.

“I did not want you to tear up that letter,” her mother said angrily.

“You wanted to show it, I suppose, to Madame Bergerot? And to Madame Beaucourt? And to the Bishop perhaps, and to Père Augustin no doubt? And

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of course they would advise you to keep me at home this winter because I evidently cannot be trusted in Paris."

Madame Perrier allowed herself to look at her daughter in perplexity instead of with that cold hauteur with which she had been accustomed to put Yvonne in her place if ever Yvonne had ventured so much as raise her eyes when she was being rebuked.

"Is this defiance of your mother the result of this curious familiarity you have permitted with the son of her *régisseur*?"

"There has been no familiarity."

"But that letter . . ."

"That letter," Yvonne broke in, "was written by a stupid boy. He wondered when I would receive his letter. He will wonder much longer when he will receive my answer to it."

"Very well, Yvonne, I shall trust you," Madame Perrier said, and clasping her daughter to her she kissed her forehead.

Nevertheless, Madame Perrier was resolved that Jules Dumont should never come back to Assumption with any medical appointment under the Colonial Office. She did not think that Yvonne was deceiving her, but young Dumont must have discerned a budding sympathy, or he would not have ventured to write that letter. Next day she crossed over the jade-green narrows between L'Enfant Perdu and the main island to consult Père Augustin, the parish priest of St Anne's who like the rest of the ten missionary priests of Assumption was a member of the Congregation of the Holy Trinity. When Madame Perrier alighted from her chaise to walk up the path that led between cinnamon bushes to the priest's house a snowy stream of white-frocked girls

in which black faces seemed to bob about like corks came burbling out. At the sight of Madame Perrier there was an abrupt silence and the stream of white frocks divided to allow her to pass through, the medals on their blue ribbons glittering in the sun.

The priest was a burly man with a voluminous beard which made his bright little eyes appear brighter and his habit seem whiter than either of them really was. He showed his visitor into his small austere study with extreme deference.

"I hope, Madame, you will excuse the inconvenience to which you were put by the Children of Mary. I have been drilling them for the procession of the Blessed Sacrament on the feast of Corpus Christi. They are good girls, but the least thing makes them laugh madly.

"I am sure you will have them in beautiful order, *mon père*, when the day comes," his visitor graciously assured him.

Père Augustin shrugged a pair of heavy shoulders, and shook his head.

"It rests with the good God."

"Did you know, *mon père*, that the son of my *régisseur*, young Jules Dumont, was studying medicine in London with the intention of obtaining a post here in Assumption?"

"I knew that he was studying medicine but I did not know that he expected to reap the reward here."

Madame Perrier drew a little pattern on the dusty floor of the priest's study with the tip of her parasol.

"Ah, yes, Madame," the priest went on quickly, "my study is always dusty when the south-east wind blows."

Madame Perrier smiled.

"I was not drawing attention to the dust, *mon père*. I was merely thinking to myself, *comme ça*, I was thinking

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that it would be a great mistake for Jules Dumont to come back here. Already he has been to school in England and after another five years he will undoubtedly have ideas above his station. It will be impossible for us if the idea spreads that any young Assomptionnois who can achieve an education different from that provided for them here will be able to consider himself on an equality with us. I am going now to consult the Bishop, but I wanted to let you know beforehand what my feeling was in this matter because I know you have a high opinion of young Dumont's ability."

"That is true, Madame."

"And I was afraid that perhaps in your enthusiasm for a clever boy of thirteen you might forget that such a clever boy by six or seven years later might have too grand ideas about himself. But above all I wanted you to know, *mon père*, that I should personally find it for myself an impossible position. You remember his grandmother?"

"A very good soul," said the priest.

"Oh, I am sure of that but her body was. . . ." Madame Perrier broke off.

"It was that which God gave her."

"Naturally. But she never tried to make that body what God did not give her. And now I must tell you something in confidence, *mon père*, something that I shall not tell even to the Bishop."

Madame Perrier related the episode of the letter.

"So you see, *mon père*," she said when she had finished, "that I am not being just an old-fashioned reactionary who is determined to keep coloured people in their place. It is already clear that young Jules Dumont has grand ideas."

In telling Père Augustin about the letter Madame

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Perrier had had no scruples about exaggerating what her daughter's correspondent had written. "

"I am grieved to hear this," the priest assured her. "I had not thought Jules would do such a thing. His behaviour was admirable when he was at home last year."

"I showed his father the letter, and poor Dumont was greatly shocked."

"I am sure he was. Ah, there you have a treasure, madame."

"Oh yes, he works very hard, and he is, so far as I know, completely honest."

"Completely," Père Augustin declared fervidly.

Madame Perrier rose.

"I'm sure you will use your influence with Dumont to make it clear to young Jules that he cannot expect any career in Assumption as a doctor."

The priest escorted his visitor to her chaise. As the vehicle drove off along the road to Belair he took a pinch of snuff and shook his head. He was thinking how much less complicated were his relations with the Children of Mary in spite of their inclination to regard one of the mortal sins as a trifling peccadillo.

Madame Perrier had sent a message by telephone to the Bishop's house to ask if Monseigneur would receive her at noon. It was now eleven o'clock. The road round the island above the seashore was shaded almost all the way by coconut palms. At this time of year the wind was blowing from the eastern side of the island from which the coast on this side was sheltered by the range of Mont Diablé, a name given to it by French settlers from Guiana, who supposed it to be inhabited by demons. Those demons proved to be fruit-eating bats twice as large as the largest known to zoology.

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Found nowhere else in the world they were extinct by the end of the eighteenth century, thanks to the zeal of the Assumption marksmen. The last of these great bats enjoyed at least the pleasure of seeing their French enemies deprived of L'Île de l'Assomption by the British whose annexation was recognized by the terms of the Peace after the Napoleonic wars. Beyond insisting strictly on the emancipation of the slaves which *les grands blancs* as the French planters were known had been importing for a century and a half from West Africa, the new owners hardly interfered at all with the established way of life on the island. The local laws were retained, and as these had been untouched by the Napoleonic Code Assomption for a long time remained the last territory of the *ancien régime*. With imperial development during the reign of Queen Victoria Assomption was given a Governor and a Legislative Council with the usual official trimmings of the Colonial Office. Until 1870 the island had been administered by a Resident Commissioner dependent upon British Guiana. When Assomption became a Crown Colony the Anglican Bishop of the South Atlantic considered whether he ought to have a suffragan on Assomption, but apart from the unsuitability for an Anglican cleric of being Bishop of Assomption the fact that hardly five per cent. of the population of 20,000 were in nominal communion with Canterbury made a suffragan bishop inadvisable. So a happy compromise was effected to the greater glory of God and the Via Media, by which Assomption was made an Archidiaconate and the tiny church in Belair raised to the dignity of a pro-Cathedral.

When Assomption became a Crown Colony a Papal decree raised the island from a Prefecture Apostolic to the diocese of Port Belair directly subject to the Holy

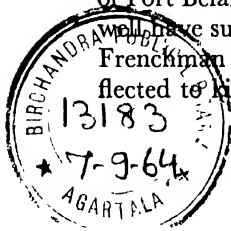
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See. It was to the house of the present Bishop, Monseigneur Jean Lafort, that Madame Perrier was being driven this morning. A coconut fell with a thud on the road just in front of the chaise and the white horse shied for a moment. Madame Perrier said something sharply to her coachman who pulled up and turned round on the box with a broad smile to reassure his mistress. Back from the road in a patch of banana and papaw trees was what looked like a battered biscuit-tin about twelve feet square: it housed a Creole family of nine: grandmother, parents and six children, of whom two had complexions of coffee with a lot of milk, three of coffee with a spoonful of milk and one of coffee with no milk at all.

Madame Perrier reflected sadly what a mistake emancipation had been as she told her coachman to drive on.

The Bishop's house, which stood a hundred yards back from Victoria Avenue about half a mile from the centre of Belair, was a building of what might be called distinguished ugliness with a garden almost as ugly in front of it. The chaise drove up to the house along the sweep of the drive between what in the rainy season was an expanse of green lawn cut up into crescents and stars and oblongs of red and blue flowers. By now the lawn was already sere and in the flower-beds there were only a few crotons surviving.

The Bishop received Madame Perrier on the verandah that ran the length of the other side of the house, looking out on the pale blue expanse of the ocean. The Bishop of Port Belair was a tall swarthy man whom one might well have suspected of mixed ancestry; in fact he was a Frenchman from St Jean de Luz. As Madame genuflected to kiss the episcopal ring his lordship managed



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to convey in the gesture with which he seemed to raise her an astonished humility at being the object of such respect.

"I hope, monseigneur, that my message did not inconvenience you?" she enquired.

"I am always more than delighted to receive Madame Perrier."

"I came to consult you, monseigneur, on a domestic matter," and as his lordship's bushy eyebrows went up for an instant she continued quickly, "but a domestic matter which might be of some social importance on the island."

"Pray be seated, madame. May I offer you a little refreshment?"

"Merci, non monseigneur. You will remember that my *régisseur*, Dumont, sent his only son to be educated in England? I believe that Père Augustin obtained your approval."

"Which I gave with some reluctance."

"Perfectly. I myself tried to make Dumont comprehend what an unnecessary extravagance it was. What I did not foresee was that he would be educated at a Protestant school."

The Bishop frowned. One of his crosses was what he considered the undue encouragement given by the Government to Anglican methods of education.

"A father who did that incurred a grave responsibility," he commented.

"Of course, I was extremely vexed when I heard what Dumont had done, but Dumont has looked after my plantations on Assumption with such devotion to my interest and has maintained L'Enfant Perdu so admirably since the death of my husband that I did not feel able to dismiss him. Moreover, Père Augustin had

assured himself that the Catholic family with whom the boy was to lodge in London would strictly look after his religious duties. However, I now hear that when he has completed his medical studies young Jules Dumont proposes to put in for a medical appointment under the Government here, and I need not tell you, Monseigneur, how deeply we should resent such an appointment for a young Assomptionnois like Jules Dumont."

"Yes, I understand that," said the Bishop. "It would put ideas into the heads of other young men. But what can I do, madame?"

"Could not you say something to the Governor?"

"I speak English with difficulty," the Bishop replied. "And Monsieur Henryson speaks French with great difficulty. It might lead to misunderstanding. I have found His Excellency very well disposed to the Catholics and I should not like to give him the impression that we are too much concerned to retain all our privileges. The English pastor"—this was the Anglican archdeacon—"would be quick as usual to argue that our influence predominates unduly in matters of education."

"I have thought that perhaps. . . ." Madame Perrier hesitated.

"Pray continue, madame. You had thought?"

"My suggestion may seem presumptuous to you, monseigneur."

"Have no fear. I shall welcome any suggestion Madame cares to make."

"I had thought that perhaps Père Vincent who is on such friendly terms with Monsieur Henryson might let His Excellency know why we should not like to see a medical appointment under the Government given to an Assomptionnois."

The Bishop promised Madame Perrier to consider

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the suggestion that his Administrator should raise the matter and when she had driven off he sent a servant to tell Père Vincent, who lived in the Bishop's house, that he wished to see him before lunch.

Père Vincent was a strikingly handsome man who as revealed by the two bare patches in his trim beard beneath his underlip was hardly yet thirty-five years old. To him the Bishop gave an account of Madame Perrier's visit.

Père Vincent gazed out across the ocean, his rich deep-set eyes seeming to reach to the horizon and beyond.

"I wonder if Madame Perrier is right, Monseigneur," he said at last.

The Bishop looked at him sharply.

"There can be no doubt that she is right," he snapped. "It would set a very bad example which might have serious consequences. Those who have come back from the war have already stirred up a spirit of discontent. We must do our utmost to prevent that spirit from spreading. If young Jules Dumont is given an official position here it is obvious that it will become the ambition of every superficially clever young Assomptionois to get himself into a position of petty authority. You may be sure that the planters will never accept young Dumont and therefore it would be a kindness to make that clear to him at once. He may then decide to abandon his notion to become a doctor, and it is only fair that he should be given an opportunity at once to plan for himself a more promising future."

"The position may be different five or six years hence," Père Vincent pointed out. "There are signs everywhere of social change."

"Undoubtedly; though I shall prefer to call it social disturbance. That being the case we must do all we

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can to discourage any manifestation of it in Assumption.'

"I was thinking about Ireland, Monseigneur."

"Yes, I remember that you were at one of your Congregation's colleges there, which is why I want you to discuss this matter with the Governor in your fluent English. It is our duty to give His Excellency the advantage of knowing what the effect would be here upon the more influential members of our island community if a young man who but for the fortune of having a father whose honesty and industry had raised him out of the ruck might at this moment be earning a meagre wage—but quite enough, quite enough," the Bishop hastily interposed—"gathering coconuts or by weeding tobacco or perhaps by fishing."

"I shall put your point of view to Mr Henryson, Monseigneur," said Père Vincent.

Mr Giles Henryson, who had been Colonial Secretary in one of the West Indian administrations before he was made Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption, had just been notified that His Majesty intended to confer upon him the K that would so considerably embellish his C.M.G. He had every reason to hope that when his five years' term as Governor of Assumption came to an end in another, three years he would proceed to round off his career in the Colonial Administrative Service by being offered one of its plums. He realised at the same time that the prime duty of a Governor who hopes for one of those plums is to do all he can to avoid drawing the attention of Whitehall either to himself or to his job. Nowhere did a masterly inactivity earn a Governor higher esteem than in the smaller Crown Colonies.

After the visit of Père Vincent the Governor consulted with his Colonial Secretary, Mr Walter Pellew,

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about the best way of dealing with the matter, "which after all is really a domestic matter," he observed.

"Quite so, sir," the Colonial Secretary agreed. He was in no mood to disagree with anybody about anything because if his Chief was expecting a K in the Birthday Honours he could hope with some confidence that a C.M.G. would soon take precedence of the parvenu O.B.E. after his name.

"It struck me that Father Vincent did not altogether like the mission with which the Bishop had entrusted him. Good fellow, Father Vincent. But of course, I didn't let him suspect what I was thinking."

"Naturally, sir."

"What I feel is, Pellew, I've no right to make difficulties for my successor here. I mean to say, by the time young Dumont is qualified as a doctor I shall have moved on."

A far-away-look came into Mr Henryson's grey-blue eyes. In this mood of optimism he was gazing beyond the Leeward and the Windward Isles to Gambia and Sierra Leone and Fiji, even for an instant to the new creation of Kenya Colony. He brushed back his thinning sandy hair and returned to the present in Government House, Belair.

"It's a pity these electricity people have quarrelled among themselves," he observed, looking up at the fan dependent from the ceiling, now as motionless as the screw of a ship at anchor. "Do you think they'll get going again?"

"They're still hoping for government assistance," said the Colonial Secretary.

"I don't think we want to worry them about that in Downing Street," the Governor commented; at this date the Colonial Office was still in Downing Street.

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"I don't think so, sir," Mr Pellew agreed.

"It's a nuisance of course not having electricity," Mr Henryson continued. "But it won't do to let the people here think that if they get into a muddle the Government is always there to get them out of it."

"We should soon be in a pretty good muddle ourselves," the Colonial Secretary declared.

"But as I was saying just now, Pellew, I think I ought to look ahead and see what might be the effect of antagonizing the important people here. I mean to say, we may not be able to understand why they should object to an obviously clever young chap like Dumont getting an official job here with the medical service but the fact remains that they do object, and that being the case we must take their point of view into consideration. Suppose I let it be understood that it was all right for young Dumont to go ahead, would that be fair to young Dumont? I don't think so."

"Nor do I, sir."

"I'm glad you agree with me, Pellew. Now, I'll tell you what I propose to do. I'm going to write to my old friend Spencer Lewis who is one of the Assistant Under-Secretaries in Downing Street and ask him to take the matter up with the Chief Medical Officer or the Deputy Medical Officer or the Principal Medical Officer—I shall leave that to Lewis of course, and get somebody to warn young Dumont in the kindest possible way that there is no chance of a medical career for him in his native island. I mean to say, the boy may have set his heart on being a doctor here. He may not want to be a doctor anywhere else, and I think it's up to us to give him an opportunity to consider another profession. Yes, I can't help thinking that Father Vincent didn't agree with the line the Bishop is taking, but my goodness, we

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don't want to get ourselves involved with the clergy here. You never know where you are with Roman Catholics. I mean to say I can handle old Archdeacon Barrow. He would always fall in with anything I wanted. Well, the whole reason for the dear old Church of England being here at all is to do their bit to support the government. But these Roman Catholics have to be handled as carefully as a hive of bees. And you know how much importance they attach at home to not upsetting the planters here. What do you feel yourself, Pellew?"

"I feel you are doing absolutely the right thing, sir."

"I'm so glad. Then I shall write to Spencer Lewis. When is the next mail out?"

"On Tuesday week, I believe."

"Oh good, that'll give me a chance to think over what I want to say. You'll have everything ready for my general report. I think I may hint—a mere hint of course—that something might be done to help the electricity people to get out of the muddle they are in. I must say it's rather a bore not having the fans working at night. And also the light. That damn boy of mine did something to my reading-lamp and when I was trying to get it right a flying cockroach caught me a fearful whack on the nose last night. I thought of saying that the absence of electric lighting was a great encouragement to illicit toddy drinking and petty thefts in Belair itself."

"I think that would be a helpful line to take, sir," the Colonial Secretary agreed.

"By the way don't say anything to Dr Wilson about this Damont business. You know how touchy he is about anything to do with his job."

"I do indeed. However, he'll be leaving us next year."

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* "Thank God for that," said the Governor fervidly. "I'm getting rather tired of his statistics about V.D. Damn it, how does he expect me to stop these hussies from making love?"

That very afternoon Mr Giles Henryson sat down to write a long letter to his old friend and contemporary Mr Spencer Lewis, one of the Assistant Under-Secretaries at the Colonial Office.

Government House,
Port Belair,
Assumption Island
May 28, 1920.

Dear Spencer,

I thought you might like to have a private word from me about Assumption. Things are going well enough except for a tiresome collapse of the Electricity Company here, due apparently to a tug-of-war between two of the principal shareholders, both of them big planters, and one of them with the handsome advantage of being the principal shareholder of the local rag, the title of which "Le Moniteur de Port Belair" is almost as long as the contents. I think matters will sort themselves out, but it's a beastly nuisance having to go back to oil-lamps in this heat. If you heard of any suggestion that the Government might either partially finance or take over complete control do give such a suggestion your support. I am not taking it up officially because I know how exasperating it is to have to deal with demands like this by a remote and not very lucrative Crown Colony.*

I am quite enjoying myself, and Ethel gets a lot of amusement out of the life, though we shall neither of us be sorry when my time is up. It's a tight squeeze here on £1800 a year and my poor allowances. A good deal wants doing to the house and my successor, poor chap, will have a battle with the financial people

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at the C.O. My object being a quiet life I put up with a shower-bath that is either a dewfall or a deluge. The servants are utterly lazy but immensely amiable, and though insects of every size and shape are innumerable there are no malarial mosquitoes and no snakes. Also we do have a couple of good tennis-courts. We tried to make a small golf-course but some large and vicious ants decided that the greens are perfect sites for their beastly nests and we had to surrender to them. However, the bathing is glorious with plenty of shark-free coves.

The French planters here give one a glimpse of what life in France must have been like before the Revolution. They still regard the descendants of their emancipated slaves as slaves. The wages paid are fantastically low but living is cheap and labour discontent is only beginning to show itself faintly. However, I'm afraid this state of affairs will not last indefinitely. Fellows who served in the war have come back with notions, and I fancy the grands blancs as the planters are called will find themselves up against it one day. Meanwhile, it is our policy to discourage agitation of any kind and since the war the French have shown themselves much less standoffish with us than they used to be.

To revert for a moment to the attitude of the grands blancs towards what they regard not merely as their inferiors but as beings hardly human by their own standards. The other day a young Assomptionnois whose father is the régisseur of the Veuve Perrier (it sounds like a champagne) after being educated at St James's School in London went on to one of the London hospitals, and has apparently announced his intention of trying to come back here five or six years hence as a medical officer. This so much upset Madame Perrier that she went to the R.C. Bishop, who deputed his Administrator, a most intelligent and attractive fellow, to let me know that such an appointment would be strongly resented by the grands blancs. Father Vincent himself obviously deplored this attitude but told

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me that young Dumont's life would be made intolerable for him and that such an appointment might lead to the kind of trouble all of us at Government House have been trying to avoid ever since Assumption was made a Crown Colony. It occurs to me that the kindest thing we could do is to warn the young man of the prospect so that before it was too late he could apply himself to another profession. Will you ask one of your medical officers to have a talk with him and let him know that a medical appointment here is most unlikely, indeed almost certainly impossible? His name is Jules Dumont and his address is 22 Harcourt Road, West Kensington. Of course, the question of his coming here will not arise in my time but it might offer an awkward problem for my successor to cope with and I think it will be fairer for everybody if the matter is dealt with now. I don't know any of your medical bigwigs at the C.O. or I wouldn't trouble you with this request. Anyway I think it is better to deal with it obliquely like this rather than for me to approach the Chief Medical Officer directly. Our present Chief M.O. here is rather a trial to me, and I don't want to bring him into the matter. He is a bit of a faddist. The other day he asked me quite seriously if it wouldn't be possible for the Government to make a free issue of contraceptives in order to reduce the incidence of venereal disease. I'm thankful to say he leaves us next year. Well, forgive my boring you with this long letter and appeal for your help. I shall try to get home next year for a spot of leave. I have a capital Colonial Secretary in Walter Pellew to act for me in absence. I'm hoping he will get a C.M.G. in the next list. He thoroughly deserves it.

Ethel sends her love to Winifred.

Yours ever

Giles Henryson

When Mr Spencer Lewis received that letter Mr Giles Henryson, C.M.G., O.B.E., had become Sir Giles

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Henryson, K.C.M.G., and he himself had become Sir Spencer Lewis, K.C.M.G.

"Dash it," he muttered, "I wish Giles wouldn't unload the social problems of an equatorial island on to me."

"I beg pardon, Sir Spencer, I didn't get that last sentence," said Miss Waddilove, his secretary who was taking down letters he was dictating.

"I'm sorry, Miss Waddilove, I was talking to myself. But will you get through either to Dr Osborne, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer or perhaps better the Principal Medical Officer, Dr Comber."

Sir Spencer had decided that a problem in as small a Crown Colony as Assumption was beneath the dignity of either the Chief Medical Officer or the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

"Dr Comber on the telephone, Sir Spencer," said Miss Waddilove.

"Oh, hullo, Doctor, I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes to give me your advice about a medical matter? You'll come right along to my room? That's splendid."

Dr Comber, a tall burly florid man with a large light-brown moustache, was as good as his word, and presently Sir Spencer's room resounded to his rich boom.

"So what I thought was, Doctor, that if you'd see this chap and let him know gently. . . ."

"Yes, it must be done gently," the Principal Medical Officer boomed in agreement.

"That there are no prospects for him in his own island," Sir Spencer continued, "you might be able to advise him about the future for his medical career."

"I'll do my best. I suppose this chap is as black as my hat."

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• "I didn't get that impression from Giles Henryson's letter to me. But perhaps he is."

While those two officials of the Colonial Office were wondering about his colour, the subject of their speculation had just shown the letter he had received from his father to Mr and Mrs Gardiner with whom he had been living since he won a scholarship at St James's School a year before the outbreak of what was still called the Great War. George Gardiner as a young man had been in the cable station in Assumption some thirty years ago, when Claude Dumont had helped him over a financial mess into which he had got himself. He had never forgotten his obligation and had been only too glad to act as guardian and host to his friend's son when the opportunity came to repay that obligation, accepting only as much as barely covered the keep of young Jules.

"Well, what do you think, Uncle George?" Jules Dumont asked.

"Now, you know I can't read French as fast as all that, Jules. Not in handwriting anyway," Mr Gardiner protested, adjusting pince-nez on his thin nose and brushing back what few hairs remained on his crown with a gesture that seemed to sweep away any obstruction to his concentrating upon Claude Dumont's letter.

"I don't know why your father wants to write in French. He talks English as well as you or me."

• "Yes, but when he writes in English, his grammar goes all to pieces," Jules pointed out.

Jules, at the age of nineteen was a slim young man with the conventional good looks of the Italian except that his clear cut profile ended in a square chin with an aggressive jut to it.

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Mr Gardiner read slowly and painfully aloud. "It is my duty . . . here, what's this word. Éclair something?"

"Éclair?" Mrs Gardiner murmured. "Oh, I like éclairs."

"*Éclaircir*. Make it clear," said Jules.

"Here, you'd better read it to us in English," Mr Gardiner decided, handing back the letter to Jules.

This comedy had been played ever since Jules arrived in England six years before. George Gardiner was still trying to persuade his wife that he spoke French, and Jules, who as a boy had immediately spotted this little vanity, always indulged Uncle George's deception. He knew that Aunt Mabel was not at all deceived but both of them were too fond of the gentle and kindly head of 22 Harcourt Road, West Kensington, to suggest his inability to translate French at sight.

Jules took the letter.

"My dear son," he began.

"Yes, I got that. Mon cher fils, what?" Uncle George put in on a faint note of self-congratulation. "It was after *devoir* that I was stuck by your father's spidery handwriting."

"My dear son, it is my duty to make it clear to you that your plan to obtain a post in Assumption under the Government as a medical officer will be opposed, and I feel successfully opposed by the people here who have the power. You may think this is unjust but you have been indiscreet in writing to Mademoiselle Yvonne Perrier about your plans. The letter was opened by Madame, her mother, and Père Augustin has let me know in great confidence that Madame has asked the Bishop to take the matter up with the Governor. I know that you meant no harm by writing to Mademoiselle but it was a very foolish thing to do. I do not know if

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your choice of medicine as a profession was inspired by your wish to play a part in the life of your native island or whether that being impossible as a doctor you would prefer to do something else. Mr Nazim is considering the advisability of establishing an agency in London and I am sure that he would offer you a clerical post. . . .”

“Who is Mr Nazim?” Uncle George asked.

“He’s the Syrian who owns the general store in Belair and the commercial kingpin of the island. It’s he who transfers money from Assumption to England. He’s really everybody’s banker.”

“Yes, of course. I thought the name was familiar. Well, what do you feel about it, Jules?”

“Don’t do anything rash, Jules,” Mrs Gardiner urged, laying down her knitting and taking off her spectacles to gaze at her adopted nephew from earnest, affectionate moist eyes of palest blue. “I never believe in doing anything rash.”

When Mrs Gardiner had gone to bed her husband asked Jules if there had been anything between him and the young daughter of his father’s employer.

“She used to like playing with me when we were kids and I thought she seemed interested in what I was going to do now that I’m grown up, and I suggested that when she came to Paris this summer I might be able to get across and meet her.”

“In Paris?” Uncle George exclaimed. “That was a bit risqué, wasn’t it?”

• “That’s what her old bitch of a mother thought, I suppose.”

“I say, steady on, Jules. That’s rather strong language to use about a lady.”

“Not stronger than she deserves,” said Jules bitterly. “They think themselves so superior. Well, you were in

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Assumption once upon a time, Uncle George. You know what the grands blancs are like."

"I only saw them at a distance."

"I'll bet. How I would have enjoyed watching them on the way to the guillotine in the Reign of Terror!"

"I say, that's rather fanciful, isn't it? But what do you think about your father's suggestion?"

"To work for Nazim?"

"Yes."

"I intend to go on at the hospital." Jules declared, and all his soul was in his chin at that moment.

Two days later he received a note from the Principal Medical Officer asking him to call at the Colonial Office at three o'clock next day and ask for Dr Comber.

"Oh dear, it all sounds very important," said Mrs Gardiner. "You mustn't be late."

The way to Dr Comber's room led through a wide corridor, the sides of which were lined with shelves of books. Jules looked more closely and saw that they were bound copies of official reports with the name of the Colony over the year to which they referred. Half-way along the corridor he saw a dignified old gentleman with a bushy white beard taking a volume from the shelf. On either side of the gap in the shelf was St Lucia 1820 and St Lucia 1822. No doubt the old gentleman was consulting St Lucia 1821 to find the precedent for settling the problem of some West Indian island in 1921. Jules felt an oppression of the spirit. *Sicut erat in principio nunc et in saecula saeculorum*, as it was in the beginning and as it always would be. Round the corner to the right and first door on the left the man in the lift had directed him. Jules knocked and a voice on the other side of the door boomed "come in".

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The tall burly owner of that voice was obviously surprised by his visitor's appearance.

"You are Mr Jules Dumont?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take a pew. Take a pew. We've had a letter about you from Sir Giles Henryson, and I understood you were—er. . . ."

"A nigger, sir?" Jules put in quickly with a contemptuous smile.

"No, no, no, but I hadn't quite realized . . . well—er—Mr Dumont I believe you have taken up medicine with the idea of obtaining a post in your island. It must be a lovely spot, what?"

"Every prospect pleases," Jules began sarcastically.

"I remember how it goes on," the Principal Medical Officer interrupted hastily. "Sir Giles thought it was only fair to let you know that there would be a good deal of opposition from the locals and that therefore you ought not to count on any official appointment. Sir Giles felt that it would be unfair not to let you know this. We should feel very worried here if after you'd been qualified your plans went wrong. But I'm sure you realize that policy is often—or rather often *seems* unfair to individuals. Mind you, if you did qualify and still desired to enter the Colonial Medical Service I'm sure you'd be able to get a job quite easily in the West Indies or in West Africa or . . ."

"Or anywhere where it was the policy of the Government to coddle the natives as much as possible," Jules said bitterly.

"Look here, you mustn't let this get you down," Dr Comber boomed. "I'm sure you're clever enough to understand that a small Crown Colony like Assumption often presents sticky little problems that don't arise in

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larger colonies. That's why I think you should look further afield for your future. And if I can be of any help to you I'll be only too glad to do everything I can."

"If I cannot be a doctor on my own island," Jules declared, "I will not be a doctor at all."

"Isn't that taking rather a narrow view of the medical profession? Merely to become a doctor because you want to be a doctor in one small tropical island seems to me rather a parish pump attitude, if you know what I mean. However, it's up to you. What will you do?"

"I shall become a barrister," said Jules, and as he said this his forehead was puckered by a frown of surprise at himself. The law as a career had never entered his mind until this moment. Then he smiled because Dr Comber was booming.

"Well, by Jove, you seem to be a young man who knows his own mind. Of course, you realize that you'll want to find a couple of sponsors before you're accepted as a student at one of the Inns of Court. And after you've passed your examinations here you'll have to take a year at Caen—I think it is. But you speak French of course?"

"It's the same as English to me."

"And your people can afford to keep you while you're studying for the Bar? You'll have three years of eating dinners."

"I know, but I shall take a job in London. The law examinations are not difficult. In fact compared with medicine they're extremely simple," Jules declared confidently.

"Well, all I can do is to wish you good luck," the Principal Medical Officer boomed heartily.

When his visitor had left he asked his secretary to put him through to Sir Spencer Lewis.

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' "Look here, I've seen this young man you wanted me to see. I don't know why you told me he was black. He's as white as you or me, Lewis. You didn't tell me he was 'black? Oh, I'm sorry, I got that impression. Well, he's giving up medicine. So Henryson needn't worry about future complications in that direction. Yes, he's going to chuck medicine and go in for the law. And you know, Lewis, I think that young chap may go far. He's not yet twenty and as sure of himself as a cat on a garden wall—do you know what he said to me as he was leaving, 'Tell me, Dr Comber, does the Colonial Office look up to see what happened in St Lucia in 1821 to find out what to do in Assumption in 1921'. I don't know what he meant but he was evidently being sarcastic. Yes, I think we may hear of that young fellow again one day."

Chapter One

THE long journey up in the lift of the Hampstead tube station and emergence from it into the freshness of the air above London can provide the imaginative passenger with a sensation akin to alighting at the top of a funicular railway in Switzerland. On a breezy blue and white morning in October just after the Second World War that sensation was keenly felt by Mr George Harrington Clapshaw because a summons to the Colonial Office had brought him the welcome news that he was to be the next Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the island of Assumption. He had not expected this. The good work he had done in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Uganda and during the war in the West Indies had not always been appreciated in Whitehall. Indeed, for a long time now he had been convinced that he was regarded with a faintly suspicious anxiety at the Colonial Office as one who was too ready to understand and even to encourage the discontented point of view of the coloured people among whom he had spent his life since he entered the Colonial Administrative Service after the First World War came to an end.

"There's one thing to be grateful for," he told his wife when he reached their little house in a trim eighteenth-century terrace near the top of Heath Street. "I shan't have to bother about another job after Assumption and so I hope I really will be able to do something for a forgotten colony before I retire."

"When will you be going out?" Esmée Clapshaw asked.

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' "I expect sometime early in the New Year. Do you think you'll be able to come with me?" her husband asked, on a note of interrogation that sounded more like a full stop.

"Not before the summer. It's vital for the work of the D.U. to take advantage of our wonderful victory at the Election."

George Clapshaw sighed. Then he quickly nodded his head in agreement. After all it was ridiculous to be sighing over a reply that he had been receiving as a matter of course during nearly twenty years of married life.

"Still, I do wish you could have come out with me. I'll have to do a certain amount of entertaining, particularly at first, and it would be a big help if you were there at the start. Couldn't the Democratic Union get on without you for a few months? You could be home in May and then perhaps come out again for the winter?"

Esmée Clapshaw lifted her glasses and tapped the end of her nose in thought. Her husband took advantage of such unwonted hesitation to press his point of view. He was a large ungainly man six feet five and a half inches tall (he always corrected anybody who suggested he was six feet six inches) and as he paced up and down the small and elegant Georgian room the impression he conveyed was elephantine.

"You see, what I feel is, Esmée, that Assumption will be a test case for the Labour Party's colonial policy, and as this is bound to be my last job I shan't pull any punches. You and I have fought for a sane and progressive colonial policy all these years . . . well, you did most of the fighting. I was handicapped always by my official position. But I never tried to put the brake on you."

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"No, you were always very good, George. But I bet you were very relieved when I failed to get into Parliament in 1935."

"No, no, I very much hoped you would be elected. The only thing I should have asked of you would have been to go slow on questions about Uganda."

"Well, I get furious about our attitudes over negroes. And I haven't stood in the way of your career after all. I don't want to boast but when your name came up for Assumption I think my work as Secretary of the Democratic Union may even have been a point in your favour with the Government."

George Clapshaw seized on this.

"That's why I want you to come out with me when I go to take up this job. It won't be like Africa. The background is old French, not the twentieth-century British settlers such as you so often get in Kenya and Rhodesia. You did quite enjoy it both in St Lucia and Antigua."

"I'll think about it, George," his wife promised. "I will really."

"You won't be too long making up your mind? I ought to let the shipping people know as soon as possible if we shall want two cabins. Passenger traffic is a problem for them in these days. Would you like a walk on the Heath before lunch? It's only just twelve o'clock."

"No, George, I've a lot of stuff to look through for the D.U. before I go down to Henrietta Street this afternoon."

So the Governor-designate of Assumption went out by himself. In the sitting-room of his wife's little Georgian house he had seemed a clumsy inappropriate figure but in the north-west breeze blowing across the

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'Heath on this morning of white cumulus sailing full-rigged along the washed blue of the October sky he strode along erect and confident. He was wearing a green tweed suit, his appearance in which at the Colonial Office that morning had drawn a tolerant smile from such Deputy Under-Secretaries, Assistant Under-Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Principals as happened to get a glimpse of him. They must all have been a bit surprised when they heard about Assumption. Mr George Harrington Clapshaw, C.M.G., M.C., to be Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption. Esmée was right. Such an appointment would not have been his unless a Labour Government had come into power.

"I wonder if she will come out with me," he speculated. She had liked the West Indies. It was only Africa that got her down. She couldn't bear that fear at the back of the minds of the whites, that fear which made them try to postpone the moment when the dark continent would be dark again by asserting their present strength. Esmée had told him a dozen times that he was afraid to unsettle the settlers as she used to say by seeming to show too much favour to the native tribes. It was useless to protest that he was already under suspicion of weakness over the native problem and that complaints to the Colonial Office sent in from time to time were not doing his prospects any good.

George Clapshaw suddenly threw back his head and laughed aloud. A little girl ran back in alarm to the protection of her baby brother's perambulator at the sound of this giant's mirth.

The governor-designate was remembering Esmée's indignant expression when soon after they were married he had told her that she was a suffragette *manquée*. And

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of course that was true. She had never forgiven herself for being only a very small girl when the war for women's rights was being most fiercely waged. It was a pity she had failed to get into Parliament in 1935. She would almost certainly have had office to-day. She might even have been Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies. However, in that case he would never have become a governor. Such an appointment would have suggested nepotism.

When George Clapshaw came in for lunch Esmée was still at her bureau; the table was still unladen.

"George, would it be a great bore for you to go and lunch at your club?" his wife asked. "I must get these replies we've received about prostitution properly classified. I promised the prostitution committee they should have them by four o'clock this afternoon. And if I am going to come out with you in the New Year to Assumption I must leave everything in perfect order in Henrietta Street."

George Clapshaw was too pleased to hear that his wife was contemplating the notion of accompanying him to Assumption to feel the least bit annoyed at having to take to the Tube again to get his lunch at the Oxford and Cambridge Club where he ran into a contemporary of his who had had the rooms above him in Meadows when he had been up at Christ Church before the old war.

"I thought I couldn't be mistaken," said Arthur Bainbridge, K.C., "and by Jove, we haven't met since Meadows in 1913. What are you doing nowadays? You're going to be the next Governor of Assumption? What an extraordinary coincidence! Have you lunched yet? No? Well, we'd better get a table. Really extraordinary! I'll tell you about it in a minute."

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When they were seated Clapshaw asked what the coincidence was.

"After the old war when I was eating my last term's dinners in the Temple before I was called to the Bar, I met a fellow from Assumption called Jules Dumont who had just started eating his dinners. He seemed a bit lonely and I asked him round to my digs in Westminster. He'd been a medical student at one of the hospitals and had intended to get into the Colonial Medical Service with the idea of going back as a medical officer to his native island. Believe it or not he was told by one of the medical nobs at the Colonial Office that he could not expect a job in his native island if he entered the Colonial Medical Service."

"Why not?"

"A mulatto grandmother. Isn't that what you call an octoroon?"

"I never heard anything so preposterous," George Clapshaw growled.

"Well, it was one of your predecessors who was responsible."

"What year was this?"

"It must have been 1920. I was eating my last term's dinners and young Dumont had just started."

"I don't remember who was governor then; that sort of thing couldn't happen to-day, thank God," the governor-designate exclaimed fervidly. "But you were saying something about a coincidence, Bainbridge. What is the coincidence?"

"Why, this very morning Jules Dumont came round to see me in my chambers. He has been practising as an advocate for the last five years in . . . what's the capital of your island called?"

"Belair."

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"Yes, that's it, in Belair. He wanted my advice about taking silk. He was in Demerara before that. That's British Guiana, isn't it?"

"Jules Dumont, you say. Yes, the name is vaguely familiar."

"He told me he was going back in the R.M.S.P. boat within the next few days. Would you like to meet him, Clapshaw?"

"I would."

"What about lunching here to-morrow? I'll try to get hold of Dumont."

Jules Dumont was now forty-five years old, but except when he smiled he seemed older, and as he seldom smiled nobody would have been surprised to hear that he was nearer fifty than forty. A strong chin, dark eyes bright with concentration, quick decisive gestures and neat figure seemed accentuated by the contrast with George Clapshaw's ungainly bulk and height, but their host was delighted to note that his two guests obviously took to one another at once. He was not surprised to hear Clapshaw invite Dumont to dine with him at home.

"I'd like you to meet my wife. And by the way are you married?"

"Yes, my wife will be going back to Assumption with me next week. She is Italian and things have not been too pleasant for her on the island during the war. That is why I was anxious for her to have a little time in Italy. But travelling is a problem just now."

"I hope Mrs Dumont will be able to dine with us. You're going back in the *Amanda*? May I ring you when I get home? Is to-morrow or Saturday all right for you?"

"Saturday would be best."

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"Yes, fish is a bit difficult at present," Clapshaw agreed with a smile.

"Your Excellency must forgive me if I'm making a mistake, but is Mrs Clapshaw by chance the Secretary of the Democratic Union?"

"She is indeed."

"A wonderful, wonderful woman. And she is coming out with you to Assumption?"

"I'm hoping so. It's not quite certain yet when she will come. She may have to wait till later in the year. However, I'm hoping she'll be with me when I sail in January. That will be the *Amanda* again."

"Indeed, sir, I deeply hope that Her Excellency will come as soon as possible. When I was Secretary of the Association of Coloured Peoples we always received such splendid help from the Democratic Union." Dumont turned to his host. "Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to meet His Excellency, Mr Bainbridge."

"I say, Dumont, you and I don't have to be so grand. I'm not a Colonial Governor. I'm only a K.C. which you're thinking of becoming yourself."

"Yes, I know, Bainbridge. But one becomes very formal in Assumption when one is not one of the grands blancs."

"Oh, what are they?"

"The grands blancs are the French planters who have preserved themselves from the tainted blood of the slaves whom they were so unwillingly compelled to emancipate after their island was lost to France in the Napoleonic Wars. They are a strange survival of the ancien régime whose forefathers escaped the guillotine."

"Yes, yes, I remember now your telling me about

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them many years ago," said Bainbridge. "Well, good-bye, it was a great pleasure to meet you again after so long."

"I'll give you a ring, Mr Dumont, to confirm our dinner on Saturday. Don't dress."

When Dumont left the club Clapshaw and Bainbridge stayed chatting for a while.

"I wonder how you're going to like your new job," said the latter.

"I tell you one thing, Bainbridge. I'm going to make it a job. And I think this chap Dumont is just the fellow I want to help me make it a job. I was pleased when he spoke like that about my wife because she and Dumont will work together."

"May I utter a word of caution?"

"Of caution?"

"Yes, don't put it down to meddling in what doesn't concern me but to the inevitable effect of a legal training. Don't let yourself be too prejudiced by Dumont. Do remember that he has got a chip on his shoulder."

"I'm not surprised. What would you or I feel if we'd had his experience at nineteen or twenty?"

"That's just it," said Bainbridge. "Dumont has a pretty big chip on his shoulder. And it wasn't reduced by what his wife probably had to put up with during the war."

"I hope I'll be able to judge for myself how to govern Assumption."

"Yes, yes, of course. His Excellency the Governor, eh?" Bainbridge chuckled.

"Oh, I know you fellows in London laugh at the self-importance of the Colonial Governor, but we don't give ourselves any more airs than a judge."

"No, I'm not laughing at Colonial Governors, my

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'dear Clapshaw. You did tell me, though, that during your career in the Colonial Service you'd 'always been suspected of waking up sleeping dogs . . . but really I've no business to be talking like this. Forgive me. Have another brandy."

"No, no, one brandy is my limit," Clapshaw said with a touch of solemnity.

"And I must be getting back to my chambers. It's been good to meet you again after all these years. Do you remember how in Meadows we sometimes used to look down our slightly priggish noses at the grands blancs in Peck?"

"Ah, they only cracked whips. They didn't use them. If the grands blancs in Assumption are as harmless as the Bullingdon bloods in Peckwater quad I shan't quarrel with them. But I'm going to make a job of Assumption. It's not enough to put a red line under an island on the map and think your imperial duty is done."

When George Clapshaw left the Oxford and Cambridge Club he stood for a moment in Pall Mall debating with himself whether he should turn right and walk along toward Trafalgar Square and up Charing Cross Road to the Leicester Square tube station or turn left and walk across St James's Park to the new headquarters of the Colonial Office in Westminster. Then he decided on the latter direction and twenty minutes later was seated with Sir Walter Wilberforce, one of the two Deputy Under-Secretaries.

"We're still half in Downing Street, you know," said Sir Walter, when Clapshaw told him he wanted to ask some questions about Assumption, "but I think John Daveney who knows about your part of the world has moved in. But don't go for a few minutes. The Bishop

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of the South Atlantic is due in a moment and is bringing along the new Archdeacon of Assumption."

The telephone buzzed and Sir Walter picked up the receiver. "Yes, bring the Bishop and the Archdeacon along to my room."

"Well, well," said the Bishop, "this is indeed a most suitable moment to arrive. Let me introduce Archdeacon Dadwell, Mr Clapshaw. Archdeacon, your new Governor."

The Bishop was a venerable figure. "I'm more venerable than any of my archdeacons" was one of Dr Blundell's conversational gimmicks for putting a junior clergyman at ease. He was a plump man of over seventy with a fine head of white hair and that old-fashioned faintly unctuous bonhomie of so many prelates of his generation. The Archdeacon on the other hand was thin-lipped and lean, probably in his mid-forties.

"I'm glad to meet you, Archdeacon," said Clapshaw. "I hope you're looking forward as much to your new post in Assumption as I am. When will you be going out?"

"I am sailing next week on the *Amanda*," the Archdeacon replied in one of those voices that sound as if the speaker had just finished eating a cracknel biscuit, some of the crumbs of which were still in his mouth.

"You're lucky, I shan't be able to get away till January. Sailings to Assumption are not too frequent."

"No, indeed. No, indeed," the Bishop joined in. "In my vast diocese . . . mostly water . . . yes, I have often been hard put to keep in touch with my clergy, few as they are. Yes, I have the largest diocese in the whole of the Anglican Church and the smallest number of clergy."

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"I hope we shall be seeing you in Assumption next year, Bishop," said the Governor-designate. "We shall meet again quite soon," he added, turning to the Archdeacon.

The Venerable James Dadwell inclined his head. He was not a man who smiled easily.

As he walked along to the room of John Daveney, one of the nine Assistant Under-Secretaries, Clapshaw did not feel that he was particularly looking forward to meeting Archdeacon Dadwell again. And then he at once rebuked himself for indulging in prejudice.

John Daveney did not know anything about Jules Dumont, but thought that Arbuckle, one of the thirty Assistant-Secretaries, might know something. In the end, however, it was young Marson, one of the sixty Principals who was able to give the new Governor some information about Assumption.

"You'll love it, sir," he said. "I was there during the war as Deputy Colonial Secretary. Sir Charles Burton, the late Governor, wouldn't let me join up with the forces because Dickybird—because Arnold Richardson the Colonial Secretary was poached by the people at home. He was on leave when war came in September."

"He's back in Assumption now, isn't he?"

"Oh, rather, you'll find him a splendid chap, sir."

"I don't think I ought to ask you for a report on the officials I shall inherit."

"No, sir, of course not. I'm sorry. But I wish I was going back to the island. The trouble is my mother is all alone and not too well. So I asked to be taken on here because she's not up to life in the tropics."

"That's a pity. I should have been glad to have you with me. What I really wanted to ask you, Marson, was

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about an advocate called Jules Dumont whom I've just met and by whom I was impressed."

"He's a jolly able barrister, sir, but . . ." Marson paused.

"But what?"

"Well, he's rather resented by the French ruling class."

"The grands blancs, eh?"

"Yes, that's what the Assomptionnois call them. I used to call them the Large Whites and the rest of the population the Middle Whites. Frankly, I thought the grands blancs were a bit of a headache. They're an exclusive lot, and very jealous of their privileges. Our policy since the island was ceded to us in 1802 has always been to coddle them. Of course there have been quite a few British planters since the coconut became the mainstay of the island but the place is still really ruled by the grands blancs."

"And these survivals of privilege disapprove of Dumont?"

"Well, sir, he has a coloured strain in him. His father was the manager of Madame Perrier's estate and his grandmother was coloured—or rather half-coloured."

"Who is Madame Perrier?"

"Oh, she's dead. In fact I never saw her, but by what I've heard she was a terrific grande dame. Her daughter Madame Vazelle is not doing too badly in the way of following her mother's footsteps. She's married to Armand Vazelle who is the chief shareholder of the weekly rag called 'Le Moniteur de Port Belair'. They live on an enchanting small island called L'Enfant Perdu, and they have big plantations on the main island. Rumour says, but you know what island rumour is, that Dumont and Madame Vazelle were great

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friends when they were young. However, he was away from the island for years. Indeed, he didn't come back until five or six years ago. The grands blancs dislike him because he makes a great point of taking up cases in which he feels that the *enfants de l'île* as they're called are being put upon or exploited by the employers of labour. I hardly know Dumont myself. Sir Charles was inclined to think that he was a bit of a trouble maker. But there's no doubt at all, sir, that he's an extremely clever lawyer. Turot, who was Attorney-General until he died last year, used to find him a difficult opponent."

"Who's the present Attorney-General?"

"I don't think anybody has been appointed yet?"

"Well, thanks for what you told me. You've definitely made up your mind to stay in London?"

"Yes, I'm afraid there's nothing else I can do. But I do wish I were going back to Assumption."

"I wish you were too. But I'll be glad of all the information you can give me. Perhaps you'll dine with me next week?"

"Thank you very much, sir."

"We'll meet at the Oxford and Cambridge at seven on Wednesday, next, eh?"

"Black tie?"

"Good god, no."

George Clapshaw lifted a hand in what might be called a preoccupied farewell as he seemed to extricate himself from young Marson's little room.

Chapter Two

"SO you were at St James's," the Governor-designate was saying when he and Jules Dumont were sitting over their coffee and brandy two days later, Esmée Clapshaw and Isabella Dumont having left them in the dining-room.

"I got a scholarship in September 1913."

"When I was taking my Civil Service examination," said Clapshaw, "I left St James's in 1910 and went up to Oxford that autumn. You didn't go to the University?"

"No, I intended to be a doctor. I was at St Thomas's for the best part of a year."

"And then you decided on the law."

"Yes."

Clapshaw was wondering whether he should let Dumont know that he was aware of what happened to change his mind about the profession he intended to enter, but before he came to a decision Dumont himself was talking freely.

"My father was the *régisseur* of the estate of Madame Perrier. *La veuve Perrier*. She had one daughter who was the playmate of my childhood until I went away to school in England. Yvonne Perrier herself went to school in Lausanne and I did not see her again until I came back to Assumption for a couple of months in the summer of 1919. She was seventeen; I was eighteen. There was no emotional bond between us. For me it was recapturing the past after the long years at school. I am afraid I found our school very boring, Mr Clapshaw."

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• “So did I,” Clapshaw agreed. “Most really intelligent boys are bored by school.”

“Then I did a very silly thing,” Dumont continued. “I wrote to Yvonne Perrier in the spring of 1920 to say I would try to come over to Paris when she went there for this finishing business. On top of that I told her about my hope of being taken on one day as a medical officer in Assumption. Apparently Yvonne Perrier showed my letter to her mother, and they were all shocked by the notion of one of the *enfants de l'île* occupying an official position. So the Governor wrote to the Colonial Office and I was told that though I might enter the Colonial Medical Service I could never hope to be given a job in my native island.”

“I suppose I oughtn't to criticize one of my predecessors,” Clapshaw murmured. “But. . . .”

“I know,” Dumont put in. “I used to hear in Demerara that you were inclined to be rather colour blind. And of course Mrs Clapshaw has always been wonderful.”

“Did you have much of a struggle at the Bar?”

“It was certainly tough at first. Luckily Nazim decided to open his London agency and I soon made myself indispensable.”

“That's the man who has the big general store in Belair?”

“Yes, and he is also the Colony's banker. No bank has a branch there. The old man is dead now but his son carries on the name and the business. Competently and very profitably. I won't bore you with the details of a long struggle. Anyway, soon after the beginning of the last war I felt justified in starting to practise on my native island. I was a bit of a thorn in the side of the planters—both French and English—because I was

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always ready to take up a case for the underdog. Your Excellency is coming to Assumption at a critical moment. The population is too large for the island but the Assumptionnois are denied any chance to find jobs for themselves elsewhere. Those who were recruited to serve in the war have returned with a feeling that if it was considered worth while for the Government to find a way for them to die it should be equally worth while for the Government to discover for them a way to live. The Church's main concern is to impede all education which is not entirely controlled by the Church. And that can hardly be called education."

"I'm sure this Government is going to tackle the problem of education everywhere," Clapshaw put in.

Dumont shrugged his shoulders.

"If they do they'll have to tackle the more difficult problem of what to do with the educated. As things are, reactionary opinion has a specious case. What is the use of educating people to make them discontented with their present lot on a tropical island out of the mainstream of the world unless you can offer them a chance of reaching that mainstream?"

"I know, I know; but I think our present Government has the right ideas. I must admit I wish that some of the individual members of it had more experience of . . . of . . . how shall I put it?"

"Of the world?" Dumont suggested, with a smile to himself.

"Yes, exactly. Tell me, Mr Dumont, apart from the French and British planters and the various officials, what sort of example do the rest of the white residents set to the Creoles?"

Dumont looked at his host quizzically. Such a question coming from one who had spent much of his

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service in the West Indies suggested that he was a puritan. He eyed the large man hunched at the head of his dining-table in his loosely-fitting tweed suit, and telling himself he had seldom seen anybody who looked less like a puritan, he decided it would be tactful to accept him as a puritan.

"Well, sir, I don't have to tell you that rum is not lime juice, and Assumption has the usual attraction for those who find that it costs too much to drink all they would like to drink at home. Then there are two or three retired bachelors who have found that the responsibility of maintaining an irregular connection with a good-looking girl is less irksome financially and socially than married life in a London suburb. Add to them the usual bunch of retired British couples who have been told by somebody who had once visited Assumption that life was cheaper there than anywhere. Such couples are to be found in islands all over the world. When they discover that living on them is not so cheap as they thought it would be they spend the rest of their lives grumbling about the place and the people to which and to whom they have committed their old age. However, there is always the Club, with its billiard-table which we really ought to send away to be re-covered, but can the Club afford it; with its library of books left behind by visitors who had not enjoyed the reading of them enough to take them away when they left the island; with its . . . but I've no business to be talking about the Club, sir. I am not a member."

"You're not?"

"Oh, no, the Club is a paragon of racial purity, and so I am not considered eligible. I was advised by one or two good friends who were willing to propose me that I might not be elected. Naturally I was un-

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willing to take the risk of such a rebuff. Do you blame me?"

"Certainly not, certainly not," Clapshaw muttered, his shaggy eyebrows meeting in a frown as he spoke.

"Oh, and there's one permanent feature of life on Assumption. There is always somebody who hopes to find the treasure of that distinguished Welsh pirate Captain Bartholomew Roberts, which is supposed in popular legend to have been buried on our island. There were two searchers when I came back to Assumption and whenever they met they nearly came to blows. One of them--Wilson his name was--went off a year later and has not returned. But Darkin remains, and after years of digging is still at sixty-five convinced that he is going to become as rich as Monte Cristo before he dies. Darkin's efforts have involved him once or twice in lawsuits in which I have acted for him. Oh, Your Excellency is going to find a certain amount of comic relief from your official duties."

"Well, I think it's time we joined our wives," said Clapshaw. And as he and Dumont came into the sitting-room, he said: "what do you think Esmée? I've discovered that Mr Dumont and I were nearly at school together."

"Mrs Dumont has been telling me about life on Assumption, George, and you'll be relieved to know that I've definitely made up my mind to desert the D.U. for a few months and come out with you in January to settle you in."

"That will be very good for Mr Clapshaw," Mrs Dumont said. "I do not think that Government House is what you call very comfortable. We have only been there to a garden party sometimes, so I do not know myself what the house is like inside. But I hear from

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those who have been "to dinner that it is not *di lusso* as we say in Italy."

Mrs Dumont—her husband was insistent that she should be Mrs Dumont not Madame Dumont—was a handsome woman of the Roman type, a few years younger than he. Her father, Vittorio Gennaro, a refugee from the Fascist ascendancy, had earned a hard living as a singing master: his daughter Isabella had been a typist in a solicitor's office. It was there that Jules Dumont had met her when he returned to England from Demerara and was making up his mind after his father's death to go back to Assumption and practise his profession there. When the hysteria of war had infected Great Britain Vittorio Gennaro had been deported with many another unfortunate Italian to be interned in Australia. The ship was the *Arandora Star* which had been torpedoed with great loss of life including that of Isabella's father.

Jules Dumont, fearing that Isabella might be interned, had asked her to marry him. She had refused at first because she thought he was asking her out of kindness, but he had persuaded her that kindness was not in his character's equipment and that he wanted to marry her because he loved her with complete selfishness. In the autumn of 1914 Dumont had managed to secure passages for his wife and himself to Assumption.

"Yes, it was a little difficult for me," Isabella had been telling Esmée Clapshaw while they were alone together. "People can be so silly in time of war. Italians, French, British. Everybody can be silly. When Jules came back to Assumption they were saying 'this and that. He was Communist at first, but when Russia was fighting against Germany it was not such a bad name to call him. So he was then to be making trouble

between the workers and the planters who were making such a lot of money in the war but were not paying any bigger wages to the people for their labour."

"I'm sure they were not," Esmée Clapshaw had commented.

"And then somebody made a story that I was a spy."

"A spy? In this remote tropical island? What were you supposed to be spying on?"

Isabella Dumont had opened her arms in the gesture with which Italians indicate the incomprehensible or the inexplicable.

"What indeed?" she had laughed. "But please, Mrs Clapshaw, do not think that I have any emotion about this. In wartime people just become silly as I say. And Jules has the confidence of many good people. We are quite happy. Sometimes I wish we could have a family, but Jules is glad that we do not have children. He has suffered much in his life because his grandmother was coloured."

"Thank God that sort of thing is dying out in Britain," Esmée Clapshaw had exclaimed.

"It is so nice that Mr Clapshaw is to be our next Governor. Jules and I will go back next week with such a hope for the island. *È tanto simpatico* as we say in Italy."

It was immediately on this enthusiastic affirmation that George Clapshaw and his guest joined the ladies.

When the Dumonts had gone Esmée told her husband again that she had quite decided to accompany him when he went out to take over his new job.

"Indeed, if we had been sailing next week I should have sailed with you, George," she declared.

He looked at her in gratified astonishment. He could not recall such enthusiasm about his work in all the years they had been married.

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"I wish we were sailing next week," said Clapshaw, "but I have to wait for my predecessor's return next month. He'll be anxious to put me in the picture, as they say nowadays, before he goes to his next job, for which he will be paid rather more than double what he was being paid to govern Assumption. Well, I shall listen to what Charles Burton says, but I doubt if I shall agree with most of it. You liked the Dumonts didn't you?"

"I liked them both extremely."

"Between you and me, Esmée, I've a notion that I'm going to recommend Dumont to be the next Attorney-General of Assumption. But I shan't do anything until I get out there. So I shall say nothing to anybody here about it. Dumont has a tremendous admiration for you and your work for the Democratic Union. 'A wonderful woman' he called you and he wasn't saying it just to please me. He quite obviously meant it. You know, my dear, I'm afraid I haven't always made it clear what a wonderful woman *I* think you are. I'm sure that one of the reasons—perhaps the main reason—why I've been given this job is because I'm your husband. After all, the Labour people had been in opposition for fourteen years till the last election and they knew how much the Democratic Union had done to influence intelligent Liberal opinion during those years. That's why I'm so glad you're going to be in at the start, because if later on I have to disturb the Colonial Office about Assumption problems you'll be able at home to give the Government back-benchers the ammunition for questions in the House. But you'll stay as long as you can in Assumption, won't you? Because it really does make all the difference in the world to me when you are about."

Esmée Clapshaw, sitting there apparently completely

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immune from private emotion, however deeply she was capable of being stirred by public wrongs, felt a sudden pang. Had she wounded this husband of hers by always putting her work before his? Had not her absorption in the work of the D.U. been self-absorption? True, before she had agreed to marry George she had stipulated that marriage was never to stand between herself and her work. But ought she to have made such a stipulation? Ought she not to have refused to marry him because she did not feel herself capable of making such a marriage what a marriage ought to be?

"George, I don't think I've been fair to you," she said abruptly.

"My dear, what absolute nonsense! No woman could have been fairer to any man."

"It has taken me such a long time to realize this that we won't go back into the past now. But I promise you that I won't let you down as a governor's wife. I've a kind of feeling that you're going to need me . . . there I go again. Oh, damn it, why do people cling to self-importance? Forget about needing me. What matters is that I need you."

She jumped up suddenly from her chair and kissed him on the forehead. George Clapshaw was so surprised by this unusual demonstrativeness that for a moment or two he sat awkwardly where he was. Then he too jumped up but in doing so upset the small table behind him and in plunging down to pick up the empty coffee cups he was able to hide his embarrassment.

Esmée laughed affectionately.

"George dear, I wish you could see yourself. You *are* so like a performing elephant."

"Yes, I'm pretty clumsy. I don't know how you've put up with me since I got back."

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It was George's turn now to kiss Esmée's forehead, but if the salute lacked grace he was unaware of it because within he was feeling like a champion skier.

Sir Charles Burton arrived from Assumption at the end of November and invited his successor to dine with him at the St James's.

"This austerity business is pretty grim," said Sir Charles, frowning at the bill of fare, "but I'm told it's just as bad anywhere except White's. Still, I suppose they've got to do it."

"Are you looking forward to . . .?" George Clapshaw mentioned the Colony to which Sir Charles had been appointed governor.

"Oh, it's not going to be easy of course. I saw Hankinson yesterday, and typically of him he said, 'Well, Charles, you've got a jolly easy job because the problem is insoluble. It's only when the problem is soluble that a governor's job is difficult.' However, there aren't any serious problems in Assumption. The most serious is how to run Government House on the ridiculous sum they pay us. The confounded place was going to be tackled just before the war. Then war came and that was that. The water doesn't work properly and the electric light's always going wrong and Assumptionois servants are pretty hopeless. However, we did do one good thing during my term of office. We did get a pretty good nine-hole golf course going. Are you a keen golfer?"

"Never played it in my life. It never seemed fair for a fellow of my size to hit a little ball like that."

"You ought to take it up when you get to Assumption. It's such wonderful exercise, but not too much. Do you play tennis?"

"I certainly don't."

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"Nor do I nowadays. But I used to play quite a lot when I was at Trinity. Pat-ball we used to call it in those days. You were at the House, weren't you? Just after my time of course."

"Yes, I went down in 1913 and got into the war almost as soon as I'd got into the Colonial Service."

"I was out in the Pacific when the war came and they wouldn't let me join up. Yes, you'll enjoy your time in Assumption, but you'll be glad when it comes to an end. The climate's all right, and thank God, Assumption is out of the hurricane zone. I had one or two nasty experiences with them in the Pacific. But after five years on an island boxed in the lower right-hand corner of a map you feel boxed in yourself. Mails once a month or six weeks and not always that in war time. Same faces in the Club every time you went in. However, fortunately my wife got keen on collecting shells and that kept her amused. Otherwise I think she'd have found formal visits to the houses of what they call the *grands blancs* even more boring than they were. Extraordinary survivals these *grands blancs*. All convinced we let France down after the war—I mean the old war. There's one live wire among them, and that's Madame Vazelle. You don't want to get the wrong side of her. She is the chief voice in the *Moniteur*. It's only a ridiculous little weekly four-page rag, but you can't afford to ignore it. After all, it's the only reading from one lot of six-weeks-old papers till the next batch arrives. Vazelle himself isn't much bother, but Yvonne is another matter. She was the heiress of Madame Perrier who died just before my time, fortunately for me, I fancy, from what I hear about her."

"I had young Marson to dinner the other day. He seems to have enjoyed himself in Assumption."

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"I know he did," the ex-Governor agreed. "When Arnold Richardson was collared by the people here young Marson had to occupy his place as Colonial Secretary. Richardson is back now. You'll find him quite first-rate and you can always rely on his advice. James Cameron, the Senior Medical Officer is too old for his job, but he won't give it up. The other doctors say he's hopelessly behind the times. As a matter of fact between you and me, Clapshaw, I was rather grateful for his lack of enthusiasm for what he calls new-fangled ideas, because he wasn't for ever suggesting sanitary undertakings which the budget simply couldn't stand. De Sousa, the Collector . . . Sir Charles paused. "Well, I think he's all right, but that's something you'll have to judge for yourself. He has Cingalese origins. And that rather goes for Bowlby, the Intendant of Police. The trouble is that neither he nor De Sousa are paid properly. £850 a year for the Intendant of Police, £950 a year for the chief tax-collector! The Colonial Office is generous enough with the M.B.E. but very stingy with the L.S.D. However, your real headache will be the fabric of Government House not the fabric of officialdom. I'm sorry my wife isn't available to give Mrs Clapshaw the domestic warnings at which women are better than we are. She's taken her old mother down to the Riviera where I'm going to join them. December in London is a bit too much of a contrast with December in the South Atlantic six degrees south of the Equator."

"I met an interesting fellow before he went back to Assumption in October. Jules Dumont. He's an Old Jacobean like myself. He's been practising as a lawyer in Belair for the last five or six years."

"Jules Dumont, eh?" said Sir Charles, and was

silent, his mouth tight below his grizzled toothbrush moustache. "Well, it's no good my saying I like him, because I don't. He's of the country, you know. I'm told his grandmother was a pretty dark specimen. In my opinion he's a trouble maker. I'm not presuming to offer you advice, Clapshaw, but personally I kept very clear of him. Legendre who's Acting Attorney-General at the moment has no use for him, which reminds me, you'll have to recommend somebody to fill the gap left by Turot's death, and I don't think you can do better than get Legendre appointed. He comes of good old planter stock and he's helped us once or twice to iron out difficulties that Madame Vazelle was inclined to exploit."

George Clapshaw made no comment. The words of his predecessor had hardened his conviction that the idea growing in his mind to make Jules Dumont the next Attorney-General of Assumption was the right thing to do. "How is Redrobe, the Chief Justice, doing?"

"Good name for a judge, eh? Edwin Redrobe comes from one of the Windward Islands, I think."

"Yes, from St Vincent. I met him about ten years ago. He didn't strike me as the sort of chap who would make a good judge."

"Between ourselves, Clapshaw, he's pretty feeble. However, there he is on the usual inadequate screw we pay in the small Crown Colonies, £1250 a year. Ridiculous for a Chief Justice. He's married too, with a large young family. Well, there it is."

Clapshaw wondered if his predecessor was hinting at bribery, but he avoided a direct question. It would be his own business to probe into that if the question should ever arise.

"You realize, of course," Burton went on, "that the

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R.C. Church is all powerful. The present Bishop will be on your tracks if this Government gets too lavish with education."

"I met the new Archdeacon."

"Oh, I'm afraid the Church of England is on a bad wicket in Assumption. Archdeacon Barrow was a dear old boy and he realized it. I hope the next one will be sensible. However, that's your business."

Talk about Assumption expanded after dinner to talk about future Colonial policy until Clapshaw rose to go.

"Well," said Sir Charles when he parted with his successor, "I wish you a happy term of office. You say you will retire at the end of it. That was always my problem. I wasn't going to retire. So I didn't want any trouble in Assumption. You sound to me as if you'd rather welcome it."

"I wouldn't say that," Clapshaw replied. "But I've never been able to let well alone, as I'm sure they'll tell you in Great Smith Street where I fancy they think my appointment is another example of the irresponsible behaviour of Labour Governments."

"Anyway, good luck to you. Don't you want the porter to get you a taxi?"

"No thanks, I'll take a bus along to Leicester Square."

And presently he was smiling benevolently at the inmates of a bus to avert the impression that by joining them he was unjustifiably overcrowding it.

Chapter Three

THE equatorial waters of the South Atlantic stretched in a monotone of pale blue velvet around the ship, a monotone that was continually being skimmed by sudden silvery spurts of flying-fish escaping from their pursuers in the ocean depths. Passengers busy with their games of deck-quoits looked reproachfully at the passengers whose earnest exercise round the promenade deck had disturbed a shot.

"Our last day," said His Excellency George Harrington Clapshaw, C.M.G., M.C., putting down on his lap the Penguin novel he had been reading without absorption.

"Thank goodness," said his wife. "I cannot understand how some people really seem to enjoy a long sea voyage."

"I'm afraid I am one of them," the Governor admitted.

"But there's nothing to do, George," she protested.

"We shall have plenty to do when we reach Assumption. Shall we take a turn round the deck?"

"No, no. I can't go on apologizing to these quoits people for interrupting their absurd game."

"Quoits!" George Clapshaw exclaimed suddenly. "I say, the origin of the name has suddenly occurred to me. Quo it? Where is it going?"

"My dear, even if your derivation is correct, it isn't a very important discovery."

"No, but I was thinking that you and I are being tossed on to Assumption like a couple of quoits."

Esmée Clapshaw looked at her husband with a smile.

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"I cannot think of a less suitable figure, George, than you for a quoit. Well, I'm going below to pack. We're to have drinks with the Captain before dinner. Don't forget."

Esmée Clapshaw extricated herself from the deck-chair and as she walked along toward the companion-way the Governor told himself once again how lucky it was for him that she was with him for his arrival in his new post.

"I only hope Government House is not going to be a domestic problem," he said to himself. This was the very kind of problem which Esmée did not welcome. Already she was looking forward to what other wives would consider much more difficult problems.

At this moment the Governor was joined by a tall, thin, clean-shaven man in a pair of khaki shorts that looked as if they had been cut down from khaki slacks, which in fact was what they had been.

"Shall I be disturbing you, sir?" he asked.

"No, no, Major Peckover. Sit down. My wife has gone below."

"First of all, sir, I think I ought to drop my military rank. I have been considering the question during the voyage and I have come to the conclusion that as I was not a regular officer it might savour of ostentation if I continued to call myself Major Peckover now that the war is over, and that I ought to revert to being plain Tom Peckover."

"I should hardly call major an ostentatious prefix," said the Governor. "But if you want to shake off the trappings of war I can quite understand it."

"Thank you, sir. Since my poor wife died I've never liked calling myself major, because she was always so insistent on talking about me as the major. I've already

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told you that my main reason for retiring to live on the island of Assumption is my hope of finding the ideal spot for the spread of moral rearmament."

"Yes, indeed, you've already told me that," Clapshaw agreed, with a cordiality in his voice that was intended to disguise a plea not to be told about Mr Tom Peckover's hopes all over again.

"There is, however, another reason of which I have not told you," Peckover went on, "and I feel that I ought to tell you because as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption you ought to know. In short I believe that I have the authentic record of where the famous pirate Captain Bartholomew Roberts buried the treasure looted from the Portuguese ships he attacked in the Bay of Bahia in 1720. That treasure, which included a diamond cross for the King of Portugal, was buried on Assumption which at that date had not yet been colonized by the French. It is my intention if I am fortunate enough to locate the treasure—and may I say that I have no doubt whatever that I shall succeed in doing this—it is my intention, sir, to devote the whole of it to the spread of moral rearmament."

"A very laudable intention, but don't forget that the Crown will demand its share."

"I do not want to take up your time by reading you the evidence I have collected about the exact whereabouts of the treasure."

"No, no," said the Governor quickly.

"But I think I ought to tell you why I wish to devote the treasure to the spread of moral rearmament."

The Governor sighed.

"I mustn't stay too long, I'm afraid. This is our last day at sea, you know."

"Captain Bartholomew Roberts was a Welshman,

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like many other pirates I might add. As such he had a strong religious inclination. He was in the strictest sense a teetotaller. He never drank anything except tea. Not even coffee. He was unable unfortunately to persuade his crew to become teetotallers, but he ordered lights out at eight p.m. every night and any drinking after that had to be done on deck. He was also very strict about letting his crew bring women on board. It was absolutely forbidden. He was a firm believer in the sanctity of the Lord's Day and forbade any music to be played by the ship's musicians who on other days could be called on for a tune at any hour of the day or night. He captured a clergyman once and tried to persuade him to remain in his ship the *Royal Fortune* as chaplain. However, the clergyman managed to escape, leaving behind him three prayer books and a corkscrew for which Captain Roberts was very grateful."

"I thought you said he was a teetotaller."

"Yes, but he was unable to prevent his crew from indulging in strong liquor and knocking off the heads of the bottles very often led to their being used as weapons after an argument and therefore the corkscrew was most welcome. So you see, sir, that if Captain Bartholomew Roberts is aware, as he certainly is, of what is going on in the world to-day he would undoubtedly welcome the idea of his treasure being used to further the course of moral rearmament."

"Yes, well, I'm afraid I really must go down and do some packing. I shall be seeing you at Government House some time soon. By the way I heard in London that there is already somebody else who is looking for the pirate's treasure on Assumption."

Tom Peckover's gaunt face was crinkled by a compassionate smile.

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"I shall be very surprised if he finds it," he said drily. "I was told about this Mr Darkin by Mr Gilbert Wilson from whom I secured a map of the treasure's whereabouts when I bought the bungalow he had built for himself, but which he gave up after he returned to England toward the end of the war."

It was ten o'clock next morning when the *Amanda* dropped anchor in Port Belair Bay half a mile away from the little harbour which was unable to accommodate vessels above a thousand tons. The passengers had been warned not to risk a trip ashore because the liner would depart as soon as the mail and cargo for Assumption had been unloaded. However, they were given plenty to occupy them by the arrival on board of at least fifty Assumptionnois with a variety of local wares. These included the characteristic straw hats of the islanders with wide brims and crowns like elongated top-hats, sea-shells of every shape and size, vivid silk scarves, carottes of tobacco, coconuts, cinnamon, cloves, nutmegs, and glossy black vanilla pods, picture postcards and sets of unused Assumption stamps on which the head of King George VI looked down from the corner on coconut-palms, poraguas, and, in the highest denomination, on the showpiece of the Assumption fauna, the now extinct Great Assumption Bat which had been twice as large as any other fruit-eating bat in the world.

Trade was not too brisk at first because the passengers gathered to watch the reception of the Governor and Mrs Clapshaw by a group of officials in white who had come aboard from the Governor's pinnace.

"George dear, your own whites are looking rather crumpled," his wife murmured.

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"Yes, I forgot to get them pressed," he muttered, in acknowledgment of her gentle protest.

"Welcome to Assumption, sir," said Arnold Richardson, the Colonial Secretary, who during the interregnum between the departure of Sir Charles Burton and the arrival of Mr George Clapshaw had been in charge of the island.

The new Governor took an immediate liking to his Colonial Secretary who was a plumpish fresh-complexioned man with curly brown hair, looking younger than his forty years.

"This is Chief Justice Redrobe, sir."

The Chief Justice was a small nervous man whose personality seemed inadequate either for his office or his name.

"I think we met some years before the war. Weren't you a magistrate in St Vincent?"

"Yes, we did meet. That was before I was married," said the Chief Justice.

When presently Their Excellencies would meet Mrs Redrobe they would understand why the tone of the Chief Justice's voice as he said that sounded as Adam's voice may have sounded when referring to Paradise before the Fall.

One after another the Treasurer, the Senior Medical Officer, the Director of Education, the Director of Agriculture, the Director of Works, the Intendant of Police and one or two others were presented to the Governor.

"Well, sir, if you and Mrs Clapshaw are ready we might go ashore," Arnold Richardson suggested. "Mr Pettiward, the Intendant of Excise, is seeing to your luggage."

The passengers interrupted their bargaining to wave farewells. The ship's siren hooted. The pinnacle chugged

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shoreward. On the quayside of the little harbour there were about a couple of hundred Assomptionnois with complexions that ranged from café au lait to café noir waiting with a mixture of cordiality and curiosity to greet the new Governor as he stepped ashore from the pinnacle. And to maintain the dignity of the occasion twenty-five Assumption Fencibles under the command of Lieutenant Archibald Melrose presented arms.

"Will you inspect them, sir?" the Colonial Secretary prompted.

His Excellency walked along the khaki line attended by the subaltern with drawn sword ceremoniously upright. Then he turned to enter the Government car by the door of which the dusky chauffeur beamed a welcome as he held it open.

"Petteward will be bringing up the luggage presently," said Arnold Richardson. "You'd like to drive up to Government House right away, wouldn't you, sir? The electric light is working well at present. I hope it won't take it into its head to misbehave now that you've arrived. The fact is the place badly needs re-wiring right through, and now that the war is over I suppose there's a chance of getting it done. I say, I do hope you're going to enjoy your time here, Mrs Clapshaw. Lady Burton got very keen on shells. Have you ever been keen on shells?"

"Never," said Esmée Clapshaw firmly. "And I don't think I'm ever likely to be."

"Well, I'm not going to pretend that I'm disappointed to hear that, Mrs Clapshaw. Young Guy Marson was very good at collecting rarities, but I was no use at all."

They had driven through the tree-shaded main street of Belair and the car was now on its way up a

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winding lane that led by a pillared entrance to the grounds of Government House.

"This is most impressive," said the new Governor, eyeing the stone lion on top of one pillar and the stone unicorn on top of the other.

"Impressive, George?" his wife commented. "I think it's ridiculously pompous."

"Legend tells of a fabulously wealthy Governor who built these gates at his own expense to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria," the Colonial Secretary informed the new arrivals.

Government House was a large square house two storeys high, solidly built of tufa with a wide thatched verandah along the front looking westward across an expanse of lawn down to the South Atlantic ocean a thousand feet below. Between that pale blue ocean and the house was grove after grove of coconut-palms without a single house in view.

"Peaceful and pleasant," the new Governor observed.

"Yes, sir," his Colonial Secretary agreed. "Are you keen on tennis? There are two hard courts over there."

"No, I don't play tennis myself. But I suppose we shall have tennis-parties."

"Oh, rather, a Government House tennis-party is always welcome. But we do have a nine-hole golf course at last of which we are rather proud."

"I don't play golf, either," said Clapshaw. "My game is croquet."

"They used to play croquet on the lawn here," said the Colonial Secretary. "But Sir Charles liked golf."

"I hope we still have the mallets and hoops. Croquet is the only game out of doors as good as chess and billiards indoors."

The Colonial Secretary tried not to receive this

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dogmatic statement with an expression of doubt on his cheerful countenance.

"I'm afraid I've never played croquet, sir, but I expect the equipment is still available. The billiard-table is not *too* bad but the cushions haven't much life left in them. However, it's in a better state than the billiard-table in the Club because the bed of that has been breaking up ever since some young N.O.'s danced a foursome-reel on it when a destroyer visited the island during the war. I wasn't here myself at the time. And that reminds me, sir, what about a combined A.D.C. and private secretary for you?"

"Mrs Clapshaw will do any secretarial work I want."

"Yes, but she won't want to be rushing around a lot. The climate can be very exhausting when we get the rains in the autumn. I was going to suggest you might care to take on young Archie Melrose. He's the son of Robert Melrose who is the biggest of the non-French planters and much respected by everybody here whatever their class or colour. Archie Melrose is the subaltern of our only company of Assumption Fencibles. You saw him down at the harbour. The Fencibles used to provide the sentries for Government House but Sir Charles abolished guard duty for them."

"Quite right," the new Governor commented.

"And their only job now is to raise the flag at sunrise and lower it at sunset with the appropriate salute. They are commanded by Captain Fussell."

"He wasn't down at the harbour, was he?"

"No, the old boy's laid up with one of his periodic goes of gout. He came ashore here thirty years ago on his way to Buenos Aires after the 1914 war, missed getting back to the boat and has never left the island since."

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"What's he do?"

"He thinks he grows tobacco but he has a little money of his own and his time is mostly spent in the Club of which he's the honorary secretary. Ah, there's Petteward with the luggage."

That evening after dinner Clapshaw and his wife sat talking in the shabby but comfortable drawing-room of Government House.

"Well, my dear, do you think you are going to like it here?" he asked.

"I think there's a lot to be done to bring the island into the present day, and I shall probably enjoy helping to do that," she replied.

"What did you think of Richardson's idea that I should take on young Melrose as A.D.C. and Private Secretary?"

"He seemed an agreeable young man. Of course I can deal with such correspondence as you have with the people in London, but he'll be useful for the locals. Moreover, George, if I should decide that I could be more use to the world and perhaps to you in London it would be just as well to have somebody here to run about for you."

"Then I'll take him on. His first job will be to go down and stir up these electricity people. These fans are working hardly as fast as a punkah. Richardson was being a bit too optimistic this morning. I think he will be good, though."

"Yes, I fancy optimism is going to be his soft spot. Still, I liked him. I didn't care greatly for Mr Petteward."

"Why?"

"Oh, no specific reason. I do not like thee, Dr Fell. That's all."

"I sent word to Dumont that I should be glad to see

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him to-morrow. I thought Richardson seemed a little apprehensive," said George Clapshaw.

"He probably was," Esmée agreed with a smile. "He obviously wanted you to see the other lawyer first."

"Legendre? Oh, of course I shall see all the lawyers before I decide about an Attorney-General. I'm going to spend all to-morrow seeing people."

Soon after this the new Governor and his wife decided it was bedtime. They stood for a moment or two in the big central hall from which one ascended by a stairway at one side to the gallery which ran round three sides of the hall, the bedrooms opening off it. The hall was used as a dining-room when there were more than four guests but there was a smaller dining-room off it for less public occasions. Beside the drawing-room was the Governor's private office and the billiards-room.

"But what about you, Esmée?" he asked. "You need an office."

"Not at all, I can work in the drawing-room during the day. Or up in my bedroom from which I have an enchanting view. Oh, what was that?"

"A flying cockroach. I'm afraid I left the door open when we came in from the verandah. Don't worry, the windows are all wired."

They went upstairs. Outside Esmée's room George Clapshaw put his hand on her arm.

"You think you'll be able to stand it here for a few months anyway?" he asked again.

"I may become absorbed by Assumption. As people become absorbed by archaeology," she said. "Good night, George. I'm glad I did come out with you."

Chapter Four

GOOD God!"

The Director of Agriculture, John Barlow, M.B.E., gazed in astonishment at Ernest Fyfield, M.B.E. It was the kind of ejaculation he might have allowed himself to utter, but to hear it with explosive force from the thin pursed lips of the Director of Education disturbed his moral equanimity.

"What on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Look! Look at H.E.!"

Tea had just been announced in the big hall of Government House for the guests of the new Excellencies' first garden party. Tea was not a drink that raised the least interest in John Barlow. Therefore he had not been watching the guests moving in from the lawn to their refreshment. He was hoping without undue optimism that now the war was over the new Governor would be a little more free with the Government House whisky than his predecessor. So he was only just in time to see H.E. leading by the arm the fat black nanny of pretty Madame Melette's children into the hall where tea was being served.

"That's going to shake the Large Whites up a bit," he said to Fyfield.

"Steady, Barlow, steady. Some of them may hear you."

"I wasn't talking nearly as loud as you were when you shouted out 'Good God!'"

"I forgot myself for a moment," said Fyfield firmly. Barlow let out a boisterous guffaw.

"He'll be putting her to sit beside him at tea before we know where we are."

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And that was precisely what the Governor was doing, to the consternation not merely of his assembled guests but also of his officials, as may be gauged from the exclamation H.E.'s action had evoked from the Director of Education, who had never been heard to say anything stronger than "oh dear!" under the emotional stress of the moment.

"It's so embarrassing for poor old Marie herself," said Madame Melette to her husband who was one of the wealthiest of the planters and a stern critic of the British administration of Assumption. Desirée Melette was a chic little blonde with a small son and daughter who were tucking in to the cakes at the Governor's table beside their black nanny.

"And so bad for Pierre and Stéfanie," she added.

"The English are mad. *Voilà, c'est tout.*" Étienne Melette was ten years older than his wife and assumed the air of superior detachment from female problems he felt was owing to the age of forty.

At that moment Madame Vazelle joined the Melettes. Yvonne Vazelle at forty-three was not outwardly the formidable personality that Madame Perrier had been at her age, but without her mother's aquiline nose and without her mother's height she was perhaps even more formidable. The young ivory of her complexion once upon a time was still an ivory untarnished by middle age. The slim bow of a mouth had lost none of its taut lines. The deep brown eyes were not less lustrous now that the warm aspirations of youth had turned to the colder ambition of maturity.

Madame Melette eyed her enviously. Petite and blonde and pretty as she was now she felt that in another fifteen years she would be insignificant beside Yvonne Vazelle.

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"You have seen what the Governor has done with my nurse Marie and my two children, Madame Vazelle?" she asked.

"Indeed, I have, my poor Désirée. And I already look forward to quarrelling with him every week in *Le Moniteur*, for evidently he thinks that it will be his duty to make gestures to remind us that England is now what they call a Welfare State. Well, what the Jacobins could not do in the Revolution to change Assumption will certainly not be done by the English socialists of to-day. *N'est-ce pas que j'ai raison, Monsieur Melette?*"

"I am sure you are right, madame. But I don't think we need worry too much," the big planter said. "His officials will warn him that he has made a gaffe. Ah, Vazelle, have you been presented to Marie yet?" he laughed.

With Madame Vazelle's husband was their son Gaston, the only child of the marriage, a good-looking youth of eighteen with a dark film-star's moustache carefully shaved above and below to give it the exiguity that was supposed to attract feminine lips. Armand Vazelle himself was tall with dark heavily pomaded hair and discontented eyes.

"Madame Clapshaw is now in earnest conversation with Dumont and that Italian wife of his," he announced.

"Dumont? Tcha!" his wife exclaimed contemptuously.

"I think Madame Clapshaw is going to be difficult," said Armand Vazelle.

"Tcha, tcha! She is more like a *gouvernante* than a Governor's wife. A woman who wears *pince-nez* in these days is not to be feared," Madame Vazelle commented.

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"All the same I was not very pleased to see her paying so much attention to Dumont," Vazelle went on. "I know you still think of him as the son of your mother's *régisseur*, Yvonne, but when he came back to Assumption you said he would not last a year, and he is still here."

"I don't know how he has managed to live on the *sous* he extracts from *les enfants de l'île*."

"*Eh bien*, he has."

"It is only because our miserable Chief Justice is so terrorized that he does not rule out of court the cases that Dumont undertakes."

"I shall now go in and tell Marie to bring the children because we are going home," Madame Melette announced nervously. "Or perhaps it would be better if you should go, Étienne."

"Ah, *merci*, I am not going to push my way through all these people enjoying their five o'clock," her husband protested. "*Ah, non, par exemple!*"

Little Madame Melette bit her pretty lips in some agitation.

"People will all stare at me so," she murmured.

"I shall go, Desirée," Madame Vazelle declared firmly.

And a minute later with an occasional bow to the guests she passed Yvonne Vazelle made her way to His Excellency's table where fat black Marie was gurgling away at His Excellency's simple jokes.

"Marie!" Yvonne Vazelle called sharply, "Madame wishes you to come at once with the children. The carriage is waiting." Then she spoke rapidly and angrily in Creole.

"I understand what you're saying, Madame Vazelle," the Governor warned her. "I was in Dominique at one

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time. Do not scold Marie. She could not refuse to sit by me when I invited her. I should understand better why Madame Melette wishes to take her children home so soon if she told me so herself."

"She declared war on me at that moment, Esmée," Clapshaw told his wife later. "And when I said 'You know Mr and Mrs Dumont, of course' it was war to the knife. By the way I want you to ask the Dumonts to dinner next week if that's all right by you?"

On the morning after the party the Colonial Secretary came round to see his chief.

"I think it all went off quite well yesterday afternoon, Richardson."

"Yes, sir, I think they all enjoyed themselves in spite of the shock."

"Shock?"

"Well, sir, it was a bit of a shock to the grands blancs when you asked Madame Melette's nanny to sit beside you."

"I could hardly be expected to let the poor old thing stand around while those rather jolly kids were stuffing themselves with chocolate cakes and all the rest of it."

"Still, it was a shock, sir."

"Are you administering a rebuke by the Colonial Secretary, Richardson?"

"No, no, sir, certainly not. Good Lord, no! It was very refreshing. Indeed, I think it will do good. At any rate, they won't be able to say you didn't make your position perfectly clear from the start."

"That's one of the advantages of becoming a Governor at last, Richardson. Throughout my career, in the Colonial Service I have had to check myself from making it too evident that I regarded coloured people as human beings. As it was I was often being reminded by my

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superiors that I was running the risk of being too familiar, and if I hadn't been pretty good at my job I should probably have got on even more slowly than I did. Well, there's nobody here to warn me against the way to do things. So I expect there'll be a few more shocks for the grands blancs before I retire at the end of my term of office as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption. Don't let us forget the Assumption Fencibles. Which reminds me. I haven't met Captain Fussell yet."

"I think his gout is still troubling him, sir."

"Is it really gout or what is generally believed to be the ancestral origin of it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact the old boy has been having his half-yearly bout. Then he won't touch rum again till August. It has been February and August for the last thirty years. And for the rest of the year he keeps strictly to fruit juice. He'll be round to call upon you pretty soon now, sir."

"Have you met this chap Peckover yet, who was with us in the *Amanda*?"

"Not yet. He's got himself a jolly place on the other side of the island looking down into Petite Anse and across to Turtle Island, a delightful little bay with some of the best bathing in Assumption. He bought the place from Gilbert Wilson when he gave up treasure-hunting and went back to England. "But he's boarding at Belle Vue with Mère Grignon in St Anne's until his furniture arrives."

"I suppose that's where he expects to find the pirates' hoard."

"He'll probably spend most of his time arguing and quarrelling with Peter Darkin who has been looking for the treasure since before the war. Wilson and Darkin

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used to argue and quarrel every time they met in the Club. You haven't been to the Club 'ye', sir."

"No."

"They're anxious to give a dinner of welcome to you and Mrs Clapshaw."

"That's very kind of them but I'd rather they waited a week or two until we're completely settled in. By the way I promised Fyfield I would go down this morning and look over this new school he's so keen about."

"It is very good but I'm afraid it has upset the Bishop."

"What's he upset about?"

"I'm afraid the new Archdeacon has been talking rather a lot about inadequate education at the R.C. schools and has given an impression that this new school is to be a missionary outpost of Anglicanism."

Clapshaw frowned.

"Dash it, the whole point of this new school is that it is to be purely secular."

"I don't think Monseigneur Tranchant will welcome that idea either. It has to be faced, sir, that the R.C. clergy view with suspicion any kind of what they consider State interference with the education they think is best for the people here. The late R.C. Bishop was a thorn in our sides. He died a year before the war. But Monseigneur Tranchant looks like being a bigger thorn in our sides. However, you'll judge for yourself, sir, when you meet him. He will insist on speaking only in French and will protest that he cannot understand English. He'll have one of his clergy to act as interpreter and that will always give him time to meditate upon his answer, for of course he does understand English perfectly as I happen to know. By the way, how is young Archie Melrose doing as your A.D.C.?"

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"He's a very nice lad." The Governor paused for a moment. "There's something you ought to know, Richardson. I'm thinking of making Jules Dumont Acting Attorney-General at once and recommending that his appointment as Attorney-General should be made as soon as possible. He doesn't know that himself yet. I shall tell him to-night when he and his wife are dining with us."

"You're thinking of making Dumont Attorney-General?" Richardson exclaimed in obvious astonishment.

"Don't you think he's the right man for the job?"

"He's certainly a competent enough lawyer but . . ." the Colonial Secretary was silent.

"But what? I know all about his origins," said the Governor. "And as long as I am here I do not intend to let such origins stand in the way of a man who I consider is worth his salt in a professional capacity."

"It is for you to decide, sir. You have a much larger administrative experience than I have. But Assumption is so far behind any other Crown Colony in liberal ideas that . . . that. . . ."

"That I must surrender to its out-of-date notions?"

"No, no, but I think you might be wise to wait a little before you frighten them with your liberal ideas."

"I disagree. I think it will be much fairer all round if I make my attitude clear from the start."

"Well, sir, if you feel like that I shan't presume to argue about it."

"I do feel like that."

Archib Melrose came in to say that the car was ready if His Excellency wanted to go down to look at the new school in Belair.

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"Are you coming, Richardson?"

"Can I be excused, sir? I have some things to do down at the office. I have my car with me."

"All right. You won't say anything of course about what we were discussing just now."

"Certainly not, sir."

The Director of Education was obviously much excited by the Governor's visit and came dancing out into the courtyard to greet the Governmental car.

"You'd think he'd built the school with his own hands, wouldn't you, sir?" Archie Melrose said with a grin.

The Director of Education had recovered from the shock of seeing the new Governor take Madame Melette's black nanny to sit beside him at the tea-table. Indeed, in an argument with Michael Boddington the Director of Works and Andrew Hunter the Postmaster last night, when dining with the Boddingtons, he had gone so far as to argue that H.E.'s gesture would help to overcome the opposition that the R.C.'s were putting up against the way the new secondary school was to be run. However, Mrs Boddington and Mrs Hunter joined in assuring Ernest Fyfield that as a bachelor he could hardly be expected to understand the disturbing effect that gesture might have upon domestic discipline all over the island.

The new secondary school of Belair was to be ready for the formal opening a month hence.

"I do think a formal opening is important, sir," the Director of Education urged, "and I do hope that you and Mrs Clapshaw will be present and that you or Mrs Clapshaw or both will say a few appropriate words at the ceremony. The foundation stone was actually laid by Sir Arthur Cowles who was Sir Charles Burton's

predecessor, and the building was nearly completed when war came and put a stop to all building operations of any kind."

"Including even so comparatively minor an operation as getting the electricity of Government House to work properly," the Governor observed.

"We hope there'll be no trouble about that in the new secondary school. Boddington seems quite happy about that. Ah, there's Mr Mauguin who is to be our first headmaster. Good morning, Mr Mauguin, His Excellency arrived five minutes ago but do not worry at being a few minutes late. I have not shown His Excellency the class-rooms yet."

The Director of Education looked at the Governor with a tolerant smile.

"We are not slaves to time in Assumption," he said kindly. "Well, how did your talk with the Bishop go off? I'd rather hoped you could come up and tell me about it yesterday."

"I think all is now settled," said Mr Mauguin, a small dark man with the clear marks of his ancestry in his hair that no amount of pomade could hide. "Père Antoine will give the religious instruction to the Catholics and the Archdeacon himself will give it to the Church of England pupils."

"That's very sporting of the Archdeacon," said Fyfield, in that tone of synthetic enthusiasm with which Englishmen of the upper-middle classes so often arm themselves to put children, natives and working-men at ease with superior beings.

"How many C. of E. pupils will there be?"

"Probably three, perhaps four."

"Very sporting indeed," the Director of Education repeated.

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After the class-rooms had been inspected, the Director announced that they were now to look at the hall.

"Of which we really are very proud, sir. In one way the interruption to the building was a blessing in disguise because if the original plan had been adhered to we shouldn't have had such a splendid hall. The British Council have been tremendously good to us. They do not feel that the size of Assumption justifies their having a representative in the island, but they have sent us a set of coloured reproductions of the British School of Painting which you will see hanging in the hall. They also sent us a radiogram with a very jolly selection of chamber-music and have offered to lend us films illustrating the British way of life."

"I'm sure they will be much appreciated by *les enfants de l'île*," said the Governor.

"Unfortunately something happened to the gramophone part of the radiogram on the voyage out and the radio part is not much use because reception from Rio is very uncertain and from Buenos Aires practically non-existent. However, we are hoping that somebody will manage to get the gramophone put into proper order. We are not worried about the films because the operator at the King George Picture House will always lend us a helping hand."

They had reached the hall of the school by now and the Director of Education waited for the Governor's exclamation of gratified amazement at the sight of the reproductions of portraits by Reynolds and Gainsborough and of landscapes by Constable hanging on the walls.

"Very nice, I'm sure," was all that the Governor said in accents of most unconvincing enthusiasm. "And what's this?" he asked, pointing to a mezzotint.

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"That's a mezzotint of Stoke Poges Churchyard."

"And I suppose your pupils will all learn Gray's Elegy by heart, Mr Mauguin?" the Governor asked.

"I am not going to promise that, sir," the headmaster replied.

"And what about your films, Fyfield? What will they teach the Assomptionnois about the British way of life?"

"We have Morris dancers in one of the garden cities, a gymnasium class at a girls' school in Hampstead, a walk round some of the colleges in Oxford, and one or two others."

"It doesn't look as if the King George Picture House need be much afraid of competition," the Governor chuckled. "Well, as soon as you know the exact date when the school will be ready for opening let me know."

The Governor, followed by his A.D.C., was escorted to his car by the Director of Education and Mr Mauguin.

"Well, Archie," he said, when they drove off. "Don't you wish you were young enough to be a pupil at the Belair Secondary School. You know, I sometimes ask myself how people, presumably chosen for a certain amount of intelligence, can be so unimaginative. The official of the British Council who picked out that mezzotint of Stoke Poges Churchyard as an inspiration for this remote equatorial island populated almost entirely by human mezzotints, should feel reasonably sure of an O.B.E. one day."

"I've never heard them called mezzotints, sir," Archie Melrose said.

"Nor have I, now that I come to think of it," the Governor agreed. "By the way, Archie, when am I going to see your commanding officer?"

"I think Captain Fussell is hoping to call on you to-morrow morning, sir. His gout is much better."

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"So he'll be drilling the Fencibles agāin, eh? I'm interested in the Fencibles, Archie. After all they are the only assurance I have that I am Commander-in-Chief as well as Governor of Assumption."

"You're not going to change your mind about the sentries, sir?"

"No, no, as long as this flag business at sunrise and sunset is carried out, that's all the military manoeuvres I want. This afternoon I promised to call on the Bishop. Will you let him know that I shall be arriving at five o'clock? Mr and Mrs Dumont will be dining at Government House to-morrow, but there's no need for you to be in attendance. What do you think of Mr Dumont?"

"I hardly know him, sir. He's not a member of the Club."

"Oh, he's not. Don't you encourage lawyers?"

"Yes, the other barristers are all members. You haven't been to the Club yet yourself, sir."

"I'll go along sometime."

"I know they're hoping you will. Sir Charles used it quite a lot. And Lady Burton often looked in at tea-time."

When the Governor and his A.D.C. returned to Government House Archie Melrose rang up the Bishop's house to find out if the visit proposed that afternoon by His Excellency would be convenient for his lordship. It was. So at five o'clock the Governor's car stopped at the door of the long ugly residence of Monseigneur Pierre Tranchant, the Bishop of Port Belair, who had succeeded the late Monseigneur Jean Lafort just before the outbreak of war. There had been hopes among the majority of Assumptionnois that Père Vincent would be the next bishop, but for some years the *grands blancs* had been letting it be known in Rome that Père Vincent

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was likely to be uncomfortably liberal at a time when any encouragement of liberalism might all too easily end in the encouragement of communism. So Père Vincent had been sent to West Africa and when Monseigneur Lafort died in 1919 Père Tranchant, a priest in the Archdiocese of Bordeaux, became Bishop of Port Belair. From the moment he arrived in Assumption Monseigneur Tranchant had made it clear that he was against new-fangled notions of education which he considered were an encouragement to free thought and political ambitions among people who would remain happier themselves and make their employers happier if they remained in the state to which it had pleased Almighty God to call them. He was completely French in his outlook and refused to admit he could speak English. It is true that he did speak it very badly but he understood it well enough to prepare his answer to whatever question a British official asked him while his Vicar-General Père Antoine, a Trinitarian father who lived in the Bishop's house, acted as interpreter. Père Antoine like Père Vincent had been for several years at one of the Colleges of the Congregation of the Holy Trinity in Ireland.

Both Monseigneur Tranchant and Père Antoine were small men and when George Clapshaw came on the long wide verandah of the Bishop's house both of them looked smaller than usual beside his own ungainly height.

"J'espère, excellence, que vous ne serez pas gêné si Père Antoine parle pour moi en anglais. Malheureusement moi je ne parle pas anglais. C'est dommage mais. . ." his lordship shrugged his shoulders.

"Et moi je ne parle pas français," said George Clapshaw. This was far from true.

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"*Mais vous le parlez bien,*" the Bishop exclaimed.

"Non, non, je préfère que Père Antoine traduise ce que je dis parcequ'il serait—er—it serait . . . please tell his Lordship that I don't want to run the least risk of his misunderstanding what I am trying to tell him," Clapshaw said, turning to Père Antoine. Then he introduced Archie Melrose.

"This is Monsieur Melrose who is acting as my aide-de-camp."

"*Mais je connais bien Monsieur Melrose. Alors, asseyez-vous, s'il vous plait. Je viendrais vous offrir une tasse de café.*"

Soon they were seated in comfortable wicker chairs as the sun with deepening gold drew nearer to the ocean.

"I was looking over the new secondary school in Belair this morning, monseigneur, and I've been wondering whether we can persuade you to perform the opening ceremony next month."

The Bishop was looking over his sharp nose at the Governor as suspiciously as a rat might look at a trap while Père Antoine was translating his visitor's question.

"I could not do that in Lent," he replied at last.

"Naturally, we will not have the opening until after Easter. I was so glad to hear from Mr Fyfield that you approved of the arrangements that will be made for the religious instruction."

"I have no objection to them. But I am a little anxious about the secular curriculum. Religious instruction is not the only channel of error. In times like the present we must be continuously vigilant. Atheistic communism is everywhere always active, yes, even in a remote island like Assumption we are not secure against its pernicious influence."

"The teachers in the new school will all be Roman

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Catholics, I understand," the Governor pointed out.

"Yes, I have been gratified to learn that. But I must be frank with Your Excellency and say that I am not convinced that there was any necessity to spend so much money on what is called higher education when such money might have been spent more usefully on other projects."

"As for instance on what other projects, monseigneur?"

The Bishop paused before replying.

"I should have said upon medical services, excellency, "if I had not been shocked to hear that one of the Government's junior medical officers had recently been advocating the use of these abominable contraceptives. I spoke to Dr Cameron about this, and Dr Cameron, for whom let me say I have great respect, informed me that his assistant in making such a suggestion had been actuated solely by the prevalence of venereal disease in the island."

"We are of course greatly worried by this," the Governor assured him.

"Venereal disease is the penalty for mortal sin," the Bishop declared severely.

"That may be so, monseigneur. But that does not absolve us from the duty of doing our utmost to stamp it out. And I can assure you, monseigneur, that while I am Governor of Assumption I shall always do what I can to see that money spent on education will not be money diverted from the medical services to which the island is entitled. Surely, monseigneur, you will agree that there is still great scope for improving the island's educational facilities?"

"Education can so easily promote discontent, Excellency. Our people here—*les enfants de l'île* we call

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them—already have the simple education that suits their simple souls. There is a school in every parish where they can learn all that is needed to prepare them for the life they will lead.”

The Bishop went on to draw a picture of life for the Assomptionnois in what he made sound like a paradise of easy existence. The gathering of coconuts for a wage that might sound small perhaps in those parts of the world corrupted by industrialism but was entirely adequate in Assumption where fish was abundant, and the fruits of the earth equally abundant.

“Why should these simple souls be encouraged to believe that they would be happier by learning about life in the great world far away from Assumption which hardly any of them can ever hope to experience?”

“You must remember, monseigneur, that many did have that experience when they served in North Africa during the war. Anyway, it is the policy of His Majesty’s Government to develop education in all the Crown Colonies and I earnestly hope that you, monseigneur, will do all in your power to make it easy for the education authorities to cooperate with you. The last thing we wish is to antagonize religious feeling. We are anxious to have your help and when practical your advice. We recognize the predominant influence of the Roman Catholic Church in this island. And it was to mark our recognition of this that I have invited your lordship to perform the opening ceremony at the new Belair Secondary School on the earliest date after Easter that suits you.”

The translation of that last speech had given the Bishop, who had followed every word of it in English, plenty of time to consider his reply.

“Very well, excellency, I will do what you ask, but I

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must request that the Protestant pastor does not take any formal part in the proceedings."

The Bishop's description of Archdeacon Dadwell so much tickled Archie Melrose that he had to stub out hastily the cigarette he was smoking in order to hide his mirth.

"Mrs Clapshaw and myself will be on the platform with you, monseigneur. Nobody else," the Governor assured him.

As Clapshaw and his A.D.C. were driving back to Government House the former said with half a sigh, "Sir Charles told me in London that Lady Burton got rather bored in Assumption. I'm not surprised."

He was preparing himself for the moment when Esmée would tell him that the work of the Democratic Union demanded her presence in Henrietta Street.

It was after dinner on the night after the visit to the Bishop of Port Belair that Jules Dumont was told by the Governor that he wished him to accept the status of Acting Attorney-General in the expectation that his position as Attorney-General would be confirmed by the Colonial Office.

The barrister's dark eyes glowed for a moment.

"May I without impertinence, sir, express my humble admiration of your courage and say that I shall do my best not to disappoint that courage?"

"There's nothing in the least courageous about it," the Governor growled. "I think you're the best fellow for the job. That's all there is to it. How do you get on with Chief Justice Redrobe?"

"We shall get on well when I am Attorney-General. The Chief Justice has a great respect for . . . well, I suppose I ought not to call it success yet awhile . . . let me say for what he recognizes as the outward sign of

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success. I suppose that's natural for a man with a family of six children, the eldest of whom is only eleven or twelve."

"And neither you nor I have any children at all, Mr Dumont," Esmée Clapshaw put in. "We must judge even a judge charitably."

Dumont flushed.

"You are right to rebuke me, Mrs Clapshaw. But it has not been easy for my wife and myself since I came back to my native island. I am afraid I was carried away for a moment by grateful emotion." He turned to his wife. "Isabella cara, don't look so apprehensive."

"I was thinking about Mr Legendre—and Mrs Legendre. They will both be enemies now."

"They have both been enemies ever since we came here," said Dumont.

As if to express the resentment of the Legendres over the Governor's action in making Jules Dumont Acting Attorney-General of Assumption a roll of distant thunder muttered somewhere over the ocean on the other side of the island.

"Didn't you tell me, Dumont, that you were not a member of the Club?" the Governor asked.

"No, sir, I'm not a member. I was warned that I might not be elected if I were put up and one doesn't care to expose oneself to that sort of thing," Dumont replied.

"I shall put you up myself. So I hardly think that there's much likelihood of your being blackballed."

"Blackballed, eh, sir? I don't think in my case a more suitable word for rejection could be found."

"But this is utterly ridiculous," Esmée Clapshaw exclaimed. "Do you seriously tell us, Mr Dumont, that a barrister in your position could be refused membership of a little tinpot club because . . . because . . ."

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"Because I am an octoroon, Mrs Clapshaw, to give my racial origins their exact description."

"These French anachronisms here are too ludicrous," Esmée Clapshaw said contemptuously.

"It ish't only the grands, blancs that are living in yesterday, Mrs Clapshaw. Most of the English people here are just as much prejudiced. I suppose their attitude is inspired by fear. The long supremacy of the white race is at last threatened as a result of two world wars."

"Come, come, Dumont," said the Governor. "You didn't find any prejudice against you at the school we were both at."

"They didn't know that my grandmother was a mulatto. Nor did they know at the Temple. In any case educated people in England weren't worrying. To them the attitude of the British colonial and still more of the American southerner is incomprehensible. They see no evidence around them of a threat to white supremacy. But I'll make a prophecy. If emigration from the West Indies to England increases you'll find in another few years that there will be agitation about the threat of coloured immigrants. Of that I am certain."

"He may be right," Esmée Clapshaw said after the Dumonts left that night.

"Well, if he is," her husband replied, "that will give the Democratic Union one more opportunity to justify its name."

During the drive back to the Dumonts' little bungalow buried in trees on the lower slopes of Mont Diablé, Jules hardly spoke. When the lamps of the car lit up the name on the gate he clasped his wife's hand.

"Mon Espoir," he repeated. "You asked me once, Isabella, why I gave our house that name."

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"And you would not tell me," she said.

"I'll tell you now because at last my hope may come true."

"What was your hope? Was it perhaps that now we may have children?" she asked softly.

"No, no, Isabella, that never," he said quickly. "You know that was what we agreed before we were married. It was never my hope to bring octoroons into the world. No, my hope was that one day I should be in a position to make the grands blancs wish that they had not prevented my becoming a doctor, and now as Attorney-General I think I shall be in that position."

Chapter Five

THE Assumption Legislative Council, consisting of the Governor assisted by five official members and five unofficial members of whom two were nominated by the Governor and three elected, was the stock imitation of democratic government on which Colonial administrations rely. The Assumption Executive Council made no claims even to a pretence at democracy, consisting as it did of the Governor, three official members, and four unofficial members nominated by the Governor. All the members of the two Councils except one of the elected members were members of the Belair Club and therefore it was not surprising that the Belair Club considered itself the mainspring of the island's life. The election of a Legislative Councillor for Belair itself very soon after the war ended had come as a severe shock because Jacques Grimoux, besides being a disturber of the peace by advocating a demand for higher wages from those employed in the plantations had dared to defeat Armand Vazelle, the husband of Madame Vazelle and managing director of *Le Moniteur de Port Belair*, the first time that an emancipated slave (this really was the way the *grands blancs* regarded the Creole population) had ventured to stand for election to the Legislative Council.

The windows of the Club drawing-room looked down across a lawn that was green only in the rainy season, when nobody could walk about on it, to the little harbour of Port Belair. It was still called the drawing-room because it was the large room used as a lounge by both the men and women members, and when the Club

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was founded in the last decade of the nineteenth century people did not talk about lounges. Most of the furniture showed signs of nearly sixty years of wear, but the small tables at which the ladies gossiped over their morning coffee or afternoon tea had been acquired just before the second war and looked new and flimsy beside the chairs bleached by the sun and wind of the outdoor parties at which they had served. The male members of the Club had a sanctuary on the other side of the bar to which the ladies by old-fashioned custom were not expected to penetrate. When the Club premises were built Smoke Room in white letters above the door was considered enough to keep the ladies out. In recent years ladies had once or twice found Smoke Room an inadequate warning against intrusion and at several meetings of the Club Committee it had been suggested that something more than Smoke Room was needed to protect this sanctuary for males. However, no member could think of any way of excluding ladies that would avoid giving an impression that the smoke-room was a lavatory. As might be expected it was always the English lady members that violated the men's sanctuary. The French lady members had a nicer sense of decorum.

"However, I don't think we shall have any more trouble," Captain Walter Fussell, the honorary secretary, had told the Committee at their last meeting. "I wrote to one or two of the lady offenders who—er—offended and I think that the news has gone round the island now."

It was Captain Fussell who on the morning of the first of March arrived at the Club completely cured of the gout that would not attack him again until the first of August, and now full of zeal for the business of the Club which during his February gout had been waiting

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for him to attend to it. He was in outward appearance a stocky stolid man, the last person whom one would have expected to get off a liner on the way to Buenos Aires and decide to remain on a remote island like Assumption. That had been nearly thirty years ago, and as he was never tired of saying, he had never regretted his decision. He had built for himself a small bungalow above a sandy cove with a dozen acres of land on which he grew tobacco. With a small private income of his own he had never been dependent on the success of his tobacco crop, and for nearly thirty years he had been able to indulge in an attack of gout twice a year. He was so well liked on the island that everybody quite genuinely sympathized with him over the gout, in spite of being aware what that gout really was. For thirty years now the trickiest problem he had been called upon as secretary of the Club to solve had been the problem of ladies coming into the smoke-room. He was far from dreaming on that morning of the first of March that he was about to be faced with a problem far more difficult than any that had so far confronted him.

"Hullo, Archie," he said. "I'm all right again now. It was a nuisance that old gout of mine getting me down just before H.E. arrived. But I didn't worry. I knew the Fencibles would be quite all right in your charge. I was very glad to hear H.E. has made you his A.D.C. Always remember how pleased I was when Sir Giles Henryson made me his A.D.C. in 1920. Pleased as Punch I was. Look here, come into my office, my boy, I want to ask you something."

Archie Melrose followed his commanding officer through the billiards-room towards the Secretary's little office.

"We really must do something about getting a new

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billiard-table now that the war is over. I think it would pay the Club better than getting the old one renovated. We could give the old one to the Archdeacon for this youth club he's started. Very sporting effort that youth club."

"Yes, but Bowlby's a bit annoyed because they've been cutting the telephone wires to make brass strings for their guitars. Hunter was livid about it." Andrew Hunter was the Postmaster.

"Well, you can't blame him, can you?"

"No, certainly not. But Bowlby says the police have quite enough to do without having to go chasing all over the island after missing telephone wires."

"I think Bowlby's sometimes inclined to think that nobody has any responsibility for anything that goes on in Assumption except the police. He knows perfectly well that he's only got to ask me and I'll give him all the help he wants from the Fencibles. The fact is of course he's jealous of us because he can't order us about. You didn't have any trouble with him when H.E. arrived?"

"No, no, Bowlby was too busy looking after H.E.'s luggage. I think he was afraid Pettiward would mess it up at the Customs."

"Well, of course he's never managed to get into the heads of the fellows down there that their job is to use discretion and not go emptying everybody's luggage out of curiosity. But never mind the billiard-table. That's not what I want to talk to you about."

Captain Fussell rose and opened the door of the office with a sudden swing back.

"It's all right. I didn't want one of Tou-Tou's listening acts."

Tou-Tou was the steward, a large and genial ebony

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figure who hated anything to go on in the Club of which he was unaware.

"No, it was about H.E.'s garden party," said Captain Fussell, when he was back at his desk, "Mrs Boddington, who came round to see how I was and very kindly brought me some mangosteens . . . you know it's all nonsense what some people say about mangosteens only growing in Malaya. My dear Archie, I assure you that these mangosteens from the Boddington garden were just as good as any I ate in Singapore when I went out there in 1910 to decide whether I'd go in for rubber."

"You were going to tell me what Mrs Boddington said, sir."

"I wish you wouldn't call me, 'sir' when we're not in uniform. It makes me feel so dashed Methusahlish. Yes, well, as I was saying Mrs Boddington told me that H.E. invited the Melettes' black nanny to sit beside him at tea."

"Yes, he did."

"You stagger me, Archie. You absolutely stagger me. My toe was giving me such gip when Mrs Boddington was telling me this that when she'd gone I thought I must have imagined it. You see, I was quite muzzy with pain at the time, and you can imagine anything when you're absolutely muzzy—with pain, I mean. But it must have caused a bit of a sensation, didn't it?"

"The Large Whites looked down their noses a bit, but H.E.'s such a splendid chap that I don't think he cared a damn what they thought."

"All the same, Archie, I must say I think it was a strange thing for a Governor to do at his first garden party. After all, it isn't as if he was a stranger to our ways. He's had a lot of service in the West Indies."

"If you don't mind, Captain Fussell, I'd rather not

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discuss H.E.'s action. As his A.D.C. I've no right to do that."

"No. Quite, quite. All the same it was a dashed odd thing to do. And I know I shall hear a lot of comments on it from members."

"What I've come down about this morning, Captain Fussell, is to ask you to put the name of Jules Dumont in the candidates' book."

"What? He'll never be elected in a year of Sundays. And I'll be frank with you, Archie, and say I'm jolly surprised to find you putting up Dumont Diablé as they call him for membership. Does your father know you're doing this?"

"I'm not doing it. It's H.E. who's doing it."

"H.E.? You stagger me."

"H.E. has appointed Dumont to be Acting Attorney-General at once, and I've no doubt the Colonial Office will confirm the appointment on his advice. And then Dumont will be Attorney-General."

"Well, of course that's a matter for H.E. to decide, but I am sure that Dumont's official position here won't ever secure his election to the Club."

"You mean if he's put up he'll be blackballed?"

"Look here, Archie, I landed in Belair from the *Andalusia* for a couple of hours and I was so taken with the island that I missed going back on board when she left for Buenos Aires. That was nearly thirty years ago and as I may have told you before I've never been off the island since and what's more I've never regretted what I did. And I think I can claim to know something about the way people feel about things here. I'm not anti-colour myself. Well, I wouldn't have taken on the command of the Fencibles if I'd been anti-colour, but you can't imagine me putting up one of our sergeants for

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membership of the Club. Dumont is one of what they call the enfants de l'île, and it has been a . . . well, not exactly a rule of the Club because after all you don't want to put down in black and white that any colour^{ed} blood debar^s a fellow from membership. I mean to say it would give an idea that the members were prejudiced."

"That's a pretty mild word for what they feel."

"Yes, yes. I know, you belong to the younger generation, Archie, and I suppose you think they're all an antiquated lot of has-beens. But you must see their point of view. Your father is the most popular planter in the island both with the grands blancs and with the workers. Why? Because he has been fair to both of them. Have you told your father what H.E. is proposing to do?"

"No, I have come right along from Government House. My job is to do what H.E. tells me to do, not to discuss it with my father."

"I think your father will be staggered when he hears about it. Just as I was staggered. I wonder if he's told Dickybird about Dumont."

"The Colonial Secretary was arriving at Government House just as I left."

"I bet H.E. has heard from Dickybird by now that he's making a big mistake."

"I doubt if Richardson will argue with H.E. about whether Dumont is a good choice for Attorney-General."

"I'm not talking about Dumont's appointment as Attorney-General," Fussell exclaimed irritably. "I'm talking about putting him up for membership of the Club. Dickybird knows as well as I do what the feeling is likely to be among the members. And after all if

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Dumont is not elected, and he won't be, it's going to make H.E. look rather small."

"You haven't met H.E. yet, Captain Fussell. He's a good six foot six and big all over."

"It's not the time for joking. You know what I mean by looking small."

"If the Club refuses to elect Dumont after he has been put up by H.E. I think the Club may feel rather small."

"The Club's the Club, my boy. It's the centre of life in Assumption. Who's going to second Dumont?"

"I was going to ask my father to second him."

"And if he won't?"

"I shan't give him the chance of refusing after what you've said. I shall suggest that H.E. asks the Chief Justice."

"You seem very anxious to embarrass us all," Captain Fussell said. "What's made you so keen all of a sudden on Dumont Diablé? Did you know that's what they call him in the Club?"

"Yes, of course I knew," Archie Melrose snapped.

"I don't know who it was made the joke first. Somebody must have done it while I was having one of my goes of gout."

"All right, his name's Dumont and he lives below Mont Diablé and he's won several cases that the Large Whites thought were in their pocket. It doesn't take a great wit to make that joke. I might call the grands blancs mont blancs or blancmanges and think I'd made a good joke. But that wouldn't make it a good joke."

"Don't get annoyed, Archie. I didn't know Dumont was a friend of yours. Well, if he's a friend my advice to you is to advise him to withdraw his candidature."

"When he has been put up for the Club by H.E.?"

"Well, that's my advice. Now then what are you

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going to drink? You'll have to excuse me from joining you. I have to go on the wagon after one of these goes of gout."

"No, thanks, I won't have anything either. Look, I've been thinking. It seems to me that if the Governor puts up somebody for membership that's enough. I don't see why anybody else's name is required."

"The Rule says a candidate must be duly proposed and seconded," the Secretary insisted.

"Oh, well, I'll ask H.E. about that."

When Archie Melrose had left Captain Fussell nearly jumped off the wagon more than once that morning when members looked in at the Club for their pre-lunch gimlet or swizzle or simple pink gin as one after another of them expressed his amazement at the Governor's defiance of Club tradition by putting up Jules Dumont for membership.

"Well, I'll say this," said Armand Vazelle. "If the Committee haven't the guts to turn him down I'll demand a general meeting of the Club and vote for a new committee. And I'll make that quite clear to the other members of the Committee when we meet next week."

A murmur of agreement ran round the smoke-room as other members drained their glasses before calling upon Tou-Tou for another round to fortify their resolution.

Up at Government House Clapshaw had just told the Colonial Secretary about his decision to make Jules Dumont Acting Attorney-General at once with the intention of asking the Colonial Office to confirm the appointment as permanent.

"What's the salary of the Attorney-General?" he asked.

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"£1160, sir."

"And of the Chief Justice?"

"£1350."

"He'll be in Court now?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, will you let him know, Richardson, about the new Attorney-General."

"I will. You realize, of course, sir, that this appointment is going to come as a bit of a shock?"

"To the Chief Justice?"

"No, for I think he and Dumont have always got on well. I've never heard of any breeze between them in Court. No, I was thinking of the other barristers. Legendre expected to be appointed Acting A.-G. when Turot died just before Sir Charles left, but Sir Charles thought you would prefer to recommend his successor."

"And now I've done so? And you think it is going to shock the other barristers?"

"It's certainly going to shock Legendre."

"That will make him all the keener to win his case when he's acting for the defence."

"It certainly will."

"What's the matter, Richardson? You look worried."

"No, sir. I'm not really worried. But there is no doubt that this appointment will be resented by the big planters. I only hope that Vazelle, or rather Mrs Vazelle, for it's she who wields the pen, won't be too vicious about it in the weekly rag."

"Need we bother about the weekly rag?"

"No, sir," the Colonial Secretary replied somewhat doubtfully, "I suppose not."

When Richardson left, his cheerful face puckered with most unusual lines of gloomy perplexity, the Governor

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went in to the drawing-room where his wife was writing letters for the mailboat expected next day.

"Well, George?" she asked looking up from his desk. "How did Mr Richardson take the news?"

"He didn't exactly jump for joy. But I'm sure I'm doing the right thing."

"Of course you're doing the right thing, George."

At this moment Archie Melrose came back. "Ah, good. There you are, Archie. You left the notification of Jules Dumont's appointment as Acting Attorney-General at the *Moniteur* office?"

"Yes, sir, and I told Captain Fussell about your putting up Mr Dumont for the Club. He wants to present his respects to you this afternoon and apologize for having had to miss your arrival on account of his gout. Will that be all right? I said I would phone and let him know."

"Yes, tell him to come along at six."

"Could I tell him to come just before? I think he'd like to see his Fencibles lowering the flag."

"Certainly."

"There's another thing, sir. Captain Fussell says that by the Club rules a candidate for membership must be proposed and seconded."

"Couldn't you have seconded Mr Dumont, Archie?"

"I thought I might seem rather junior for that. Some of them are rather fossilized down at the Club if you know what I mean. And so I was going to suggest if its all right by you, sir, that you might ask Chief Justice Redrobe to second Mr Dumont."

"By all means. You can telephone him when he gets home from court."

"There is one more thing, sir."

"Yes?"

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"Captain Fussell seemed to think that the Club Committee might not elect Mr Dumont."

"But he knows I'm putting him up?"

"Oh, yes, he knows that."

"Your commanding officer seems to have very odd notions of his duty as a club secretary."

"Oh, you mustn't be annoyed with Captain Fussell, sir. He is genuinely worried by what might happen."

"You're not seriously telling us, Archie," Esmée Clapshaw broke in, "that these survivals from another era will have the effrontery to blackball the Attorney-General of Assumption when he is proposed by the Governor?"

"I don't know, Mrs Clapshaw, but I am terribly afraid that they might," said Archie miserably.

"I thought the great fruit-eating bat of Assumption was as extinct as the dodo in Mauritius. But apparently it is still hanging upside down in the Belair Club. And we're hoping to turn a rickety Empire into a vigorous Commonwealth!"

"Don't get worked up, Esmée. This isn't yet a case for the Democratic Union to expose," said her husband. "I fancy Captain Fussell is being unduly anxious. A month with gout is apt to make a fellow pessimistic."

But the Governor was unduly optimistic. Ten days later there was a leader in *Le Moniteur de Port Belair* above the single initial "Y". It was written in French; translated it read as follows:

"Last week we announced that the vacant post of Attorney-General had been offered to M. Jules Dumont of Mon Espoir, Mont Diablé, the only son of the late Claude Dumont who was for many years the régisseur of the estate of the late Madame Perrier. We abstained from commenting upon what to many will seem an

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extraordinary appointment because it has always been the policy of *Le Moniteur* to avoid as far as possible harsh criticism of the Government in order that the friendly relations which now exist between the English officials and the people of Assumption should continue. We believe that the British Government has sincerely tried to maintain those friendly relations, and although we have sometimes had to complain of an apparent inability to grasp the profound difference in the points of view of our two nations, we remember that France and Great Britain have been allies in two world wars, although we have not always felt perfectly sure that Great Britain has always appreciated the comparative cost of the wars to the two countries.

"We realize now that we were wrong to withhold our criticism of the Dumont appointment because by maintaining silence we may have misled H.E. George Clapshaw, our new Governor, into supposing that M. Dumont's appointment was a welcome one. If we had expressed our opinion frankly H.E. George Clapshaw might have refrained from proposing M. Dumont for membership of the Port Belair Club. As it was he did propose M. Dumont and it is now our disagreeable duty to announce that the day before yesterday with the full agreement of all the members the Club Committee could not see its way to granting to M. Dumont the membership for which he was proposed. H.E. George Clapshaw should understand that the decision of the Committee does not imply any reflection upon M. Dumont's legal ability or personal character. We may have had occasion since he returned to his native island shortly after war broke out to comment unfavourably once or twice on his encouragement of agitations but we have never suggested that he was actively working

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for communism in Assumption. We recognize that as an *enfant de l'île* he is naturally sympathetic with those of the same origin as himself. What the British authorities must make up their minds to recognize is the determination of those who have preserved the purity of their race not to compromise in any way with their principles. We regret that H.E. George Clapshaw who has been so short a time in Assumption should have had to learn something about us in this disagreeable way. However, we have no doubt that he will understand that he has made a mistake and we can assure him that he will himself receive a cordial welcome from the Port Belair Club when he and Mrs Clapshaw grace the dinner which is being given in their honour next week."

When H.E. George Clapshaw read this he sat down and wrote:

To the Port Belair Club

The Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Island of Assumption and Mrs Clapshaw will not be attending the dinner at the Port Belair Club to which they have been invited. They both decline without regret the Honorary Membership to which they have been elected.

"Extraordinary chap, this new Governor of ours," said Captain Fussell to Robert Melrose who happened to be in the Club when this note from George Clapshaw arrived. "I suppose it's true what they're saying. I suppose he is a bit of a Red. Well, anything can happen after that last General Election at home. But it won't happen in Assumption. And 'without regret'. I think that must have been a slip of the pen you know. I think he must have meant to write 'with regret'."

"I don't agree with you, Fussell," said Robert

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Melrose, frowning. "From what my boy tells me about H.E. I think we shall find that the Club has made a mistake. You'd better pin that communication up on the notice-board."

"Do you think so, Melrose? I think it'll upset the members. I thought I'd just tell them that H.E. and Mrs Clapshaw aren't able to come to the dinner we were going to give them on Thursday and leave it at that."

"Oh, do as you like, Fussell," said the recognized leader of the British planters whose voice was influential both on the Legislative Council of which he was one of the three elected members and on the Executive Council. "My advice is to let the members realize that they may be unwise in declaring war on H.E."

"They're not doing that, Melrose. It's Dumont they're annoyed about."

"They may find it unwise to have declared war on him."

Robert Melrose might have voiced his doubts with even greater emphasis if at this moment he had been up at Mon Espoir where the Acting Attorney-General was talking to Miguel De Sousa, the Collector.

"And you say that the Treasurer has never suggested that the returns for income tax during the war were less than he first had hoped?"

"Never, Mr Dumont."

"It never occurred to him to ask you how it was with the price that copra was fetching the incomes of the planters showed no advance on pre-war returns?"

"No."

"Nor to mention the fantastic prices they were getting for patchouli?"

"No."

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"And it never occurred to you either, Mr De Sousa?"

Dumont's dark eyes stared at the Collector with less emotion in them than ebony.

"Never."

"Your salary has now been raised to £1100 a year. Do you find that rise adequate to meet the rise in the cost of living?"

"We can't save anything of course. But we can get along on it."

"And the income tax returns for this financial year? Do you find a decrease?"

"Oh, definitely, Mr Dumont."

"A marked decrease?"

"I would say yes. But of course copra is not what it was during the war and the export of patchouli has stopped altogether now that the more reliable fixatives for scent are again available. There has been a decline too in the demand for other essential oils."

"All right, that's all I wanted to know at present. You've got your car with you?"

"Yes."

"I was going to offer to drive you back to Belair. I have to go and see Nazim."

The Collector blinked away a quick uneasy look at the Attorney-General who gave no sign, however, of having noticed it.

"Well, I'll be getting along," said De Sousa.

Dumont walked with him down through the garden as far as the gate.

"Yes, you were lucky to pick up that car during the war."

"I got it very cheap," said De Sousa hastily. "It belonged to that chap Wilson who was looking for the pirates' treasure at Petite Anse and gave up in disgust

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because he was always being disturbed by Fussell's Fencibles when they were coast-watching."

"Yes, I remember. Well, I'll be seeing you again soon after I've had a talk with the Treasurer. By the way, you're a member of the Club, aren't you?"

"Oh, rather. I was sorry to hear about that election business, But I'm sure it will soon be put right."

"Are you, Mr De Sousa? I don't think it will ever be put right."

The Collector ground his gears in starting.

"A little nervous, I fancy," Dumont said to his wife who was picking some flowers beside the garden path. "Will it be all right for you, Isabella, if I ask Nazim to dinner on Sunday night?"

"Of course, my dear. Anybody else?"

"No, just Nazim."

Chapter Six

“YVONNE was in great form this morning, Armand,” said Maurice Florimond to Armand Vazelle when he came into the smoke-room of the Club that evening just after six o’clock. Maurice Florimond was the owner of Turtle, the other small island, some miles further to the east of Assumption than L’Enfant Perdu was on the west. He was a trim energetic bachelor in his mid-thirties who had served as a liaison officer with the Free French in the war. Educated at Harrow and at Trinity College, Cambridge, he lacked the prejudices of the other *grands blancs*, though related to many of them and himself the last of one of the oldest families of all.

Vazelle winced slightly at what he considered the excessive heartiness of his cousin’s voice.

“Always cheerful, Maurice, though what the devil there is to be cheerful about I don’t know.”

“What you want, Armand, are a few days away from it all on Turtle. You’ll meet one of the perennial eccentrics. He’s called Peckover and he goes in for Buchmanship.”

“What’s that?”

“M.R.A.”

“I don’t know what the devil you’re talking about,” said Vazelle irritably. He had also been at Cambridge some years before Maurice Florimond, but without losing any of the prejudices of his caste.

“It’s this moral rearmament. He wants to morally rearm Assumption. In his spare time he’s looking for the pirates’ treasure. I’ve asked him to stay with me

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next week and, I think he'd amuse you. Why don't you come?"

"He wouldn't amuse me at all," Vazelle snapped. "I know now who you're talking about. I've heard about this crank. I'm told he's bought that fellow Wilson's place above Petite Anse, but meanwhile he's boarding with old Mère Grignon. He'll need all the moral ammunition he can lay hands on if he's going to be proof against her two granddaughters. I found young Gaston was going round there and I gave him hell about it. Père Augustin is growing too old. The girls in his parish are getting too damned impudent."

"Well, never mind about Mr Peckover. What are we going to do about the Governor?"

"What is there to be done?"

"I think we'd better elect Dumont and smooth H.E.'s ruffled feathers."

"*Mon dieu*, you're mad, Maurice! Go and tell Yvonne that and see what kind of a reception you get."

"All right, all right, have it your own way," said Florimond. "But one of the white birds that roost every night in the big banyan trees at the end of my garden above the beach on Turtle told me that you'll bite off more than you can chew, Armand, if you and Yvonne go to war with our new Governor. Hullo, here's Fussell. What are you drinking, Fussell?"

"Thanks very much," said the Honorary Secretary. "I'll have a lime."

"And gin?"

"No, thanks, plain lime juice . . . we're well into March, and you know my rule."

"I was just saying to Vazelle, I think the Club ought to elect Dumont. I'm sure our new Governor means business, and I don't fancy it's good policy to quarrel

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with him at the start over what after all is a minor social matter," said Florimond, smiling at the scowl on the face of the managing director of *Le Moniteur de Port Belair*.

"I'm in the hands of the members," said Fussell. "But a rule is a rule."

"Oh, yes, a rule is certainly a rule. I won't contradict that profound observation," Florimond chuckled. "All the same I'm tired of this talk about racial purity. Surely the Boches have made that kind of talk stink."

"It's a pity you weren't at the meeting of the Committee, Maurice," said Fussell. "The other members were unanimous in turning down Dumont."

"My tactful cousin took good care not to be there," Vazelle sneered. "It was the only way to keep in with both sides. Anything for a pleasant life. Well, I'm not going to stay here listening to cautious advice from my young cousin. I've got to call for my wife at the office."

"Armand," that cousin called after him in a grave voice.

Vazelle turned at the door of the smoke-room.

"What now?"

"Don't you think you're letting down the supporters of racial purity by printing the *Moniteur* on this strange pale brown paper you use?"

"It was all we could get during the war," said Vazelle.

"But the war's over," his cousin replied. "It is now your duty to print the *Moniteur* on the purest white paper you can obtain."

Vazelle walked out of the smoke-room without another word and slammed the door behind him.

When he reached the office he was told by his chauffeur that Madame had already left for home.

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The boatman was waiting at the jetty when Vazelle arrived. Thanks to the price of copra during the war there had been money to spare for rebuilding the jetty and it was no longer the tumbledown affair it had been when Madame Perrier had walked along it all those years ago to tell Père Augustin about the presumptuous behaviour of his protégé, young Jules Dumont. But the drawing-room of the house on L'Enfant Perdu looked exactly the same as it had looked on the day that Madame Perrier had read the letter from her steward's son to her daughter.

"Ah, there you are, Armand," said Yvonne Vazelle when her husband came in. "I'm sorry I didn't wait for you at the office, but I had a slight headache. Well, what does the Club think of my little piece in the *Moniteur*?"

"That ass Maurice was worried about Clapshaw."

"*Vraiment*? What is he worried about?"

Vazelle gave her a copy he had made of the Governor's note.

"So they both decline without regret, eh? So they will not be dining with us? *Eh bien*, that is their loss not ours."

"I wonder if we have done right," Vazelle muttered, as he paced up and down over the faded Aubusson carpet. "You know, Maurice always seems rather an ass, but he has a way of being right sometimes—to his own advantage of course."

"But this is ridiculous, Armand. You are surely not seriously suggesting that we should admit Dumont to the Club? *Ah, ça, non.*"

"He could make himself difficult now that he is to be Attorney-General. We have all ignored him since he came back to the island, but he is still here."

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"I don't know what you are worrying about. What can he do?"

Armand Vazelle shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I expect everything will be all right. But I have a vague feeling that we may have made a mistake. Where's Gaston?"

"I don't know."

"I hope he's paying attention to what I told him about visiting Mère Grignon."

"Don't worry, don't worry, Armand. This treasure-hunter is boarding with Mère Grignon at Belle Vue. And these two girls of hers are kept busy looking after him. Ah, there is Gaston coming in now. You see, you have nothing to worry about over Gaston and you have nothing to worry about over Dumont."

"I'm not worrying about Gaston, but I hope you're right about Dumont, Yvonne."

There might have been more doubt in his voice if the managing director of *Le Moniteur de Port Belair* had been an invisible guest of the Attorney-General when he was entertaining Nazim to dinner at Mon Espoir.

"You have done well for yourself, Jules. Or perhaps I must now say Monsieur Dumont?" the Syrian was saying.

"Don't be ridiculous, Nazim. Do you think I shall ever forget what I owe your father? I don't forget."

"Yes, but I'm afraid I have not done as much for you as my father," said Nazim, who was a year or two younger than Dumont but who like most people preoccupied with money seemed some years older than his age.

"You were waiting to see if I should succeed, Nazim. That is characteristic of your nation. That is why the Syrians put up with the French for so long, and they hated the French. You didn't hate me."

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"What is it you want from me now, Jules? Because I am quite sure you want something."

"I'd like to know how De Sousa credit stands with you?" Dumont told him.

"It is quite good."

"He bought Wilson's car three years ago, didn't he? Did you advance him the money?"

"No, he had the money himself."

"Strange. I never heard that he has means of his own."

The Syrian shrugged away with a gesture of his arms the idea that he knew of any private means that De Sousa might have outside his salary.

"Don't be worried, Nazim. I'm not going to try and find out what credits your customers have with you. Bankers aren't yet compelled by law to disclose that."

"What *are* you trying to find out, Jules?"

"My dear Nazim, a lawyer must be as discreet as a banker. Long ago I wanted to be a doctor, and what was more to be a doctor in the island where I was born. It was for me to become a doctor that my father stinted himself. I did my share by getting a scholarship at St James's School. But it was difficult for him to find even the tiny sum that Mr and Mrs Gardiner asked for my keep. Then your father opened his agency in London and paid me enough to keep myself while I was studying medicine. When I was given what was meant to be a friendly warning at the Colonial Office that there would be no likelihood of my ever being given a job in Assumption if I joined the Colonial Medical Service I asked your father to help me become a barrister. He did so, and when I was called he was paying his last visit to England. I told him then that one day some people in Assumption would be sorry I had

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taken up the law instead of medicine. I wish your father were still alive to see just how sorry they will be."

As he spoke those last words Jules Dumont did not look at all as if he had been educated at an English public school. Nazim eyed him.

"You have something up your sleeve, Jules."

"I hope so. But I'm not sure yet what it is. I suppose the patchouli boom is over now?"

"Yes, yes. But it was wonderful while it lasted. The price they got for it! And the cheapness for which it could be grown! As easy as growing maize."

"Yes, I often wonder why no British bank has thought it worth while to open a branch in Belair."

"I doubt if the Assomptionnois would entrust their money to a British bank. They bank with the Swiss banks."

"And you now have an agency in Switzerland instead of London, eh, Nazim?"

The Syrian nodded slowly.

"Don't worry, Nazim. I'm not going to pry into your financial transactions. But may I give you a word of advice? Don't make it too easy for your clients to send money to Switzerland which has not been declared on their income tax returns. That is quite friendly advice. I owe too much to your father to do anything that would involve you in trouble."

"Just friendly advice, eh?"

"Just friendly advice," Dumont replied.

"Perhaps it would better to call it a friendly warning," Nazim suggested.

"Yes, perhaps it might be," Dumont agreed.

The next day Jules Dumont called at Government House.

"I'm glad you came along," said H.E. "I really do

apologize for having supposed that the Belair Club was a civilized institution. However, I've made it perfectly clear that I regard their behaviour as a personal slight and that neither Mrs Clapshaw nor I will cross the threshold of the damned place let alone attend this dinner they were proposing to give in our honour."

"Think no more of it, sir, please. Frankly I did not expect they would have the insolence to blackball a candidate put up by you, or I wouldn't have let my name go forward. But please think no more about it."

"Anyway, I have put you forward as Attorney-General and I don't imagine the Colonial Office will take their cue from the Port Belair Club."

"Nevertheless, sir, I think you will find that any reforms you try to make during your time as Governor will be fought against. That article by Yvonne Vazelle in the weekly rag was direct criticism of yourself, and I am quite sure that presently somebody will go back from here in order to try to persuade the Colonial Office that you are likely to provide them with trouble in Assumption. And there may be trouble. Not yet But when I have looked into the matter more thoroughly I feel certain that I am going to find the Inland Revenue has been steadily cheated for a number of years."

"Have you mentioned this to Delorme?"

Henry Delorme, O.B.E., was the Treasurer of the Assumption Government.

"It would be premature at this stage of my enquiries, and it has to be remembered that Delorme is connected with several of the ruling families here. I don't feel perfectly convinced that Delorme will be entirely sympathetic with my enquiries."

"That's a grave thing to say about an official, Dumont."

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"I'm not suggesting for a moment that Delorme is conniving at anything. After all, he is not called upon to question the returns of income tax that De Sousa deals with. But I'd rather not say anything more at present, sir. In due course I shall lay before you the result of my enquiries."

The palm-trees in the grounds of Government House were swaying in the trade wind when Jules Dumont left the Governor to get into his battered little car, but to the Governor himself it seemed as if the atmosphere was as heavy and airless as before an approaching storm. Clapshaw wondered if he had been wise about that appointment of Acting Attorney-General. To his wife who came into his study at that moment he said, "I think I'm getting old."

"Well, well, well, why this abrupt conviction, George?" she asked.

"I fancy Dumont is going to stir up trouble and I found myself beginning to look at trouble in the way that for years I've been deploring in Governors. I'm glad you're here with me, Esmée. You know if I were alone I believe I'd advise Dumont to leave well alone."

"Leave what well alone?"

"I don't really know yet. It may be a mare's nest. I'll say no more till I know more. Who are dining with us to-night?"

"The Archdeacon and Mrs Dadwell, Mr Fyfield, and Miss Purslow."

"That ought to be a good sedative," Clapshaw said.

The dinner was not quite such a sedative as the Governor had prophesied because his wife suffered none of the guests gladly.

"Have you met this Mr Peckover yet, Mr Clapshaw?" the Archdeacon had enquired and as he asked the

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question, there seemed to be more crumbs, than usual lingering in his mouth from a cracknel biscuit he had just been eating.

"I had one or two talks with him on the voyage out. He's one of what I believe are the perennial treasure-hunters who visit Assumption. I'm told he has bought the bungalow that belonged to a former treasure-hunter called Wilson."

"So I understand, but meanwhile he is boarding with a woman and her two granddaughters," said the Archdeacon chillily.

"Let's hope he's comfortable," the Governor said.

"Comfortable, Mr Clapshaw? Surely there are other things to hope for than comfort? I am reliably informed that the house in which Mr Peckover is staying does not enjoy a good reputation."

As he delivered this utterance the Archdeacon who was sitting on Mrs Clapshaw's right looked at Miss Purslow who was sitting on the Governor's left. Miss Emmeline Purslow was one of those faded spinsters who drift into warm sheltered corners all over the world like autumn leaves—the less adventurous to the Riviera or Italy, the exceptionally adventurous of them to places as remote as Assumption.

"You mean it's a brothel, Archdeacon?" his hostess turned to ask him.

Miss Purslow's embarrassment at such an unladylike word from the lips of the Governor's wife was covered with the help of a fishbone that went the wrong way. Mrs Dadwell who had no more curves than the Archdeacon drew herself up into an isosceles triangle.

"I should not care to use such a word, Mrs Clapshaw," said the Archdeacon. "But I am told that Mère Grignon is not so strict with her granddaughters as she

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ought to be. Her own daughter left the island before the war with some unsatisfactory individual. She was never married. Far be it from me to criticize our Roman Catholic brethren here but I cannot help feeling that they are not sufficiently strict with those for whose spiritual care they have been entrusted."

"Come, come, Archdeacon," the Governor rallied him, "you are not spiritually responsible for the morals of Mère Grignon and her granddaughters. So why are you worrying about them?"

"I am not concerned about them, but I *am* concerned about Mr Peckover who, I understand, is a supporter of this movement they call moral rearmament. It is sometimes quite inaccurately called the Oxford Group."

"Why be concerned about poor Mr Peckover, Archdeacon?" Esmée Clapshaw asked. "If he is morally rearmed he should be safe with his landlady's granddaughters however attractive they may be."

"Mr Peckover is an Anglican and occasionally attends service in our little pro-Cathedral."

"Yes, I've seen him there," said the Governor. "He told me on board the *Amanda* that besides being interested in the pirates' treasure he hoped to play a part in the moral rearmament of Assumption. I expect he's starting with Mère Grignon's granddaughters."

"You'll have them in St Paul's pro-Cathedral yet, Archdeacon," said Esmée Clapshaw.

"I do not proselytize," the Archdeacon retorted stiffly.

"Oh, no, Mrs Clapshaw," Miss Purslow exclaimed, hopping into the conversation like the eager little church fowl she was. "We never attempt to convert Roman Catholics."

"Oh, yes, we are really very careful about that, Mrs

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Clapshaw," Ernest Fyfield added hastily. "We have to step so warily in education to avoid treading on the toes of the Roman Catholics. H.E. knows that only too well. Don't you, sir?"

"My own impression," said the Governor, "is that the dislike of our education is not due so much to doctrinal anxiety as to the fear of encouraging the people here to stand up to the plantocrats. At home of course the Church of England is identified in the minds of the people with conservatism. Here it is regarded as the symbol of an old-fashioned British imperialism and at the same time, paradoxically enough goodness knows, as the encourager of democratic ideas."

"The Church of England an encourager of democratic ideas?" Esmée Clapshaw laughed. "If they can believe that they can believe anything."

"Surely you will agree that Archbishop Temple was a great upholder of the democratic ideal, Mrs Clapshaw?" the Archdeacon asked, thin-lipped compassion for his hostess's ignorance in his tone. "As indeed in my own humble way I am myself."

"Are you a member of the Democratic Union, Archdeacon?" she enquired with a hint of mockery.

"The Archdeacon is a member of the English Speaking Union," Mrs Dadwell interposed severely.

The Governor anticipated what he feared might be a flippant reply.

"Ah, well, Archdeacon, the Bishop has agreed to open the new school after Easter. So we may hope that he doesn't consider it a threat to the Catholic Church."

"To the *Roman* Catholic Church? Anglicans believe that they are as much entitled to be called Catholics as our fellow Catholics in the Roman communion."

"Indeed yes," Miss Purslow sighed fervidly,

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"Oh dear," Esmée Clapshaw said, "the conversation is getting too theological for me, I'm afraid. "Have you tasted turtles' eggs yet, Mrs Dadwell?"

"No, I have not, Mrs Clapshaw."

And as nobody at the table had yet tasted turtles' eggs the hostess's attempt to steer the conversation away from the Roman Catholic Church failed.

"I have not yet met the Roman Catholic Bishop," said the Archdeacon, and he made this announcement in exactly the same tone of voice as that in which Mrs Dadwell had just said she had not tasted turtles' eggs.

"You'll be meeting him when the new school is opened," the Governor told him. "But it might be a good idea, if you called on him before that, don't you think?"

"I'm afraid a step like that might be misunderstood."

"By whom?"

The Archdeacon did not think that it would be wise to embark on an exposition of ecclesiastical protocol in case the Governor's wife should again suppose the conversation was becoming too theological for her. He was beginning to fear that her failure to attend service in the pro-Cathedral was due not so much to a lazy indifference as to an active agnosticism.

"We always have to remember that we Anglicans are a small minority in Assumption," he reminded the Governor. "And our people might suppose that I was—er—that I was—er—deferring too much to the Roman Catholic Bishop if I called upon him first."

"You mean they'd suspect you of appeasement, Archdeacon?" Esmée Clapshaw suggested.

"I wouldn't quite say that, Mrs Clapshaw."

"No, it is rather a dirty word to-day," she agreed. "Like peace in the United States."

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"I have only very happy memories of American kindness both in Bermuda and in Trinidad," the Archdeacon said in a tone he intended to be a kindly reproach but which sounded like a disapproving rebuke.

"You weren't very kind to the poor Archdeacon, Esmée," her husband told her when their guests had gone home.

"My dear George, I was angelic," she protested, "considering it was all I could do not bang him on the top of his head with my spoon."

"Never mind. He's much more likely to be on our side in our battle with the plantocracy than the Bishop is."

"That may be so, but would his support be of the slightest use?"

"Oh, well, Esmée, we don't know. The struggle hasn't really begun yet."

At the moment when the Governor made this remark the Attorney-General was saying to the Collector whom he had invited to dine with him at Mon Espoir:

"Then you agree with me, Mr De Sousa, that it would be advisable to question the returns of income submitted by some of the big planters since the war?"

"But I'm hoping to be transferred soon. I'm overdue for a transfer. I hope to go back to Ceylon."

"You'd rather those returns were questioned by your successor? And let me assure you they certainly would be. Mightn't that reflect upon you? By the way if you do get a transfer soon I expect you'll be selling your car. I'd be glad to have the first refusal of it."

"I'll remember that."

"I know you gave Wilson quite a good price for it."

"Well, of course, it was impossible to get hold of a car in Assumption at that time."

"I know."

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And De Sousa asked himself if the Attorney-General knew what he had paid for that car, and was wondering where he got the money.

"Mr Delorme has never commented upon the returns of income tax," he said.

"Delorme is a family connection of two or three of the big planters," the Attorney-General reminded him. "Besides, it is not his business to investigate income-tax returns. It is my business when I suspect deliberate evasion. Don't forget that deliberate evasion can mean heavy financial penalties on those guilty of it."

"I'm well aware of that, Mr Dumont."

"Then I should like to go through your records, Mr De Sousa, for the last twenty years."

"The last twenty years?" the Collector gasped. "But I only came to the island a few years ago."

"But the record of the income-tax returns must exist in your office."

"Oh, yes."

"Then I shall be glad to examine them. Before you get your transfer," the Attorney-General added. "And if you give me all the help you can you need not be afraid of criticism of yourself. I shall take care of that. So don't worry. The odium will fall on me. And I want it to fall on me."

Jules Dumont walked along through the garden to where his guest's car was standing outside the gate of Mon Espoir.

"Yes, it is a good car. I don't wonder Wilson asked a stiff price for it," he said. "Don't forget to let me have the first refusal of it when you leave Assumption."

As the sound of the car died away down the narrow lane leading up to Mon Espoir Jules Dumont smiled to himself.

Chapter Seven

IT was about a fortnight after he had set in motion the Inquisition into the income-tax returns of the big planters that Jules Dumont drove to the parish of St Anne to call on Père Augustin. As his rickety little car jolted over the road, for the money to carry out the necessary repairs to which after the long neglect of war time Michael Boddington, the Director of Works, was hard at work competing with the Director of Education, the Chief Medical Officer and the Postmaster, all of whom were making inroads upon the island's revenue, the Acting Attorney-General was thinking how far away and unattainable his present position would have seemed to him once upon a time. As the car passed shack after shack among thin patches of bananas and pawpaws, with glimpses of piccaninnies whose little bodices varied in hue from sun-tanned white through every shade of brown to black, Jules Dumont reflected how easily any one of those shacks might now be in his home unless his father had had the resolution, the industry and the honesty to rise above the handicap of being the offspring of some unknown sailor's night out with a dark beauty over eighty years ago. Jules' grandmother had died when he was three years old, and he could not remember whether he had ever been really aware of her or whether he remembered what he had been told about her in his childhood. His own mother had died before he was ten years old. She had been the nursemaid of Dr Carlton, the Chief Medical Officer. She had been hardly thirty when she died, and Jules Dumont marvelled again at the way his father had

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stinted himself to save enough for his son's education in England. He had asked his father once why he had been christened Jules and had been told that it was to please his grandmother, who had been the granddaughter of Jules Dumont, a small French planter in the early part of the nineteenth century. It had been his mother who had put into his head the idea of becoming a doctor. He used to listen to her tales of life in Devonshire when she was a girl and of how much she had enjoyed herself when during their leave at home Dr and Mrs Carlton had engaged her as a nursemaid for Frank and Stella, their two small children aged three and five. Then at the end of their leave Mrs Carlton had asked her to come back with them to Assumption. Three years later Dr Carlton had been transferred to another post and Jane, their Devon nurserymaid, had married Claude Dumont and remained on the island. Life with a doctor's family had sounded like a fairy tale when Jane Dumont talked about it to her own small son, who by the time he was seven years old had made up his mind somehow or other to become a doctor, and as he grew older had added to that ambition the ambition to be the Chief Medical Officer of Assumption one day.

Jules Dumont was thinking about the past when a curve of the road running beside the ocean under what seemed an endless avenue of coconut palms brought him in sight of L'Enfant Perdu—the little island on which he had been born and on which he had spent his childhood. Madame Vazelle was forgotten for a moment and he was running along a golden beach with Yvonne Perrier to tell his father how he and Mademoiselle Yvonne had found the largest cowrie shell that anybody had ever seen. And he had polished it with his father's help and Yvonne had told him when he brought it to

her that she would always keep it on her dressing-table. When he went to school in London and lay awake at night sometimes, pretending to himself that the sound of the London traffic was the sound of the rollers breaking on the golden beaches of L'Enfant Perdu, he would be back on the little island with Yvonne, exploring rocky pools with Yvonne, scrambling up to the coconut groves on the top of the island with Yvonne, and looking down with her at the quiet green water of the sound between L'Enfant Perdu and its mother island of Assumption. And then that summer after he had left school and come home for three months before he became a medical student . . . he scowled at the little island. He had been useful to pass the time away for Yvonne before she went back to school in Lausanne. He had been besotted enough to fancy that she was still fond of him; he had been fool enough to write that letter suggesting the possibility of meeting her in Paris when she went there to be finished. Finished indeed! He had never believed that Madame Perrier had intercepted and opened her daughter's letter. He had always been convinced that it had been Yvonne Perrier who had shown his letter to her mother. No doubt Mademoiselle had begun to ask herself whether the son of her mother's *régisseur* might not be getting above himself. She was already seeing herself as Madame Somebody or other, and this servant's son, this grandson of a mulatto woman, had dared to wonder if when he came back to the island as a doctor she would still be Mademoiselle Yvonne Perrier. They would have been wiser to let him come back as a doctor. He would not have bothered as a doctor to find out that Monsieur Armand Vazelle had claimed to have spent six times as much as he had actually spent on rebuilding the tumbledown

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jetty of the St Anne estates. He would not now be hoping to take Monsieur Armand Vazelle to court for perhaps a fine of £10,000 or even more. When long ago he had decided to chuck medicine and take to the law he had vowed to make things as difficult as he could for the *grands blancs* who had tried to teach him a lesson for his presumption. But he had never dared to hope that one day he would be in a position to teach them such a lesson as it would soon be in his power to teach them now.

The road curved inland again and L'Enfant Perdu was out of sight. A few minutes later he stopped his car at the gate of Père Augustin's house and walked up the trim path between the cinnamon bushes to the priest's door.

"Ah, *mon fils*, I am glad to see you. I hear I have to congratulate you." He spoke in French and Jules Dumont answered him in French.

Père Augustin's voluminous beard was now as white as an egret, but he was still as burly as ever, although already in his eighty-second year. His austere little study looked exactly the same as it had looked over a quarter of a century ago when Madame Perrier called upon him to complain of the behaviour of his favourite young parishioner.

"Yes, I have been appointed Acting Attorney-General, and the Governor assures me that my appointment as Attorney-General is certain to be confirmed by the Colonial Office."

"*Eh bien*, I always had a great belief in your abilities."

"Yes, you and my father helped me more than anybody to make something of my life."

"If you have a son of your own, Jules, I shall hope

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God will spare me to do as much for him . . . but what nonsense to talk! I am already long past the allotted span."

"And I shall never have a son," said Dumont.

The priest frowned.

"*Pourquoi?*"

"Because I do not intend to bring into this world a boy who may suffer as half an octoroon. *Ça, c'est pourquoi.*"

The priest shook his head.

"We are nearly in the middle of the twentieth century. Nobody talks about octoroons to-day."

"They may not use such old-fashioned words as quadrone or octoroon, but here the attitude towards them has not changed in our island Eden, *mon père*. And even in England one will hear it said of somebody that he has a touch of the tar-brush. All right, all right, I am now in my forties; it is not the same to hear something like that when one is fourteen. I will not inflict it upon somebody for whose existence in this world I am responsible."

Père Augustin sighed.

"To-morrow will be the feast of St Joseph. Remember what courage St Joseph showed once upon a time. It could not have been very easy for him to know what people were saying about that holy and immaculate Virgin who was his wife."

"I am no Joseph, *mon père*. I have been enraged by what they were saying here about my wife because she was Italian. Why, they were daring to call her a spy!"

"Does it so much matter what stupid people say in time of war? One of the evils of war is that it gives to stupid people a temporary importance."

"But the stupidity continues here in Assumption, *mon père*," Dumont insisted. "The Governor proposed

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me for membership of the Club and the Club refused to elect me because I had coloured blood. Over twenty-five years ago, as you know well, I was denied my hope of being a doctor on this island of ours because I had coloured blood. So I became a lawyer instead, and those who were responsible for that will soon regret that I gave up medicine for the law. No doubt you've heard that enquiries were being made here in St Anné's about the jetty that Vazelle built during the war?"

"Yes, I had heard that," the priest asserted.

"Those enquiries were inspired by me, and those enquiries are going to cost Monsieur and Madame Vazelle a very great deal of money."

"That would have been a grief to your father, *mon fils*."

"My father is dead."

"But when you see him again . . ."

"If I see him again. I have not your faith, *mon père*."

"Jules, Jules. I did not expect once upon a time that I should live to hear you say that."

"Once upon a time I had my dreams. Those dreams did not come true."

"But this spirit of revenge is not worthy of you, Jules."

"It is not only the spirit of revenge that makes me determined to give *ces grands blancs* a lesson. I wish to help my own people, *les enfants de l'île* to enjoy a better life on this earth instead of being kept under by those who still regard them as only fit for slavery. In this (and you must pardon my saying this) they were encouraged by the Church."

"By the Church?"

"Does not the Church teach them that they must be content to remain in the position in which God has seen

fit to place them, because one day they will be rewarded in eternity where they will get plenty to eat and be able to play the guitar all day long. Oh, there are exceptions. You were an exception, *mon père*, when you helped me as a boy to aim at something higher."

"If I merely helped you to achieve something higher materially I failed in my duty as a teacher. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

Père Augustin murmured those last words in Latin into the depths of his great white beard.

"You must forgive me for saying that, *mon père*, but I cannot forget that the late Bishop used his influence to persuade Sir Giles Henryson to write to the Colonial Office and let me know that I could never hope to be appointed to Assumption in the Colonial Medical Service. And I have often asked myself why when Monseigneur Lafort died Rome did not approve of Père Vincent as the next Bishop instead of ensuring that your Congregation should send him to West Africa where his work on behalf of the coloured people has been outstanding, though he is still a simple Trinitarian father like yourself."

"I too regretted Père Vincent's departure from Assumption."

"I am sure you did. I remember one day when you introduced me to him here in this very room just before I left for England. He was a very young priest and he was very kind and encouraging to a small boy setting out on a great adventure. But he was an exception like yourself, *mon père*. And now we have an exceptional Governor and an exceptional Governor's wife. Once it has been made clear to the *grands blancs* that they cannot hope to be preserved like a museum piece in

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the world of to-day I believe that an enlightened governor with the support of a more enlightened government at home about colonial affairs will transform Assumption."

"I have not yet met His Excellency," said the priest.

"I hope soon to bring him and Her Excellency to call upon you. But I am waiting until my enquiries about the jetty are complete. I should not like the Bishop to get into his head that I had obtained any help from you in those enquiries."

"The Bishop will not concern himself with such matters," said Père Augustin abruptly.

"No, but Père Antoine is not Père Vincent. Père Antoine enjoys dining with the Bergerots, the Melettes, the Vazelles and all the rest of them. But let us talk no more about the *grands blancs*. How is moral rearmament progressing in your parish?"

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça? Moral rearmament?*" Père Augustin asked in astonishment.

Jules Dumont tried to explain to the priest what moral rearmament was, but at the end of it Père Augustin was shaking his head over what he evidently thought was some novel and obscure Protestant sect.

"I asked you that because you have a moral rearmament missionary in your own parish. Peckover is his name. He has bought Wilson's place by Petite Anse, but he's living at present with Mère Grignon until his belongings get here. He hopes to find the pirates' treasure."

"Ah, I know whom you mean. I saw him at Mass once. He was very well conducted. And he is spreading this strange new religion? I have heard nothing about that. The older I grow, *mon fils*, the more I marvel at people trying to find a new religion when if they only

tried to use their sense they would find an old religion that would give them all they want."

"Let's go and call on Mr Peckover," said Dumont suddenly.

"You shall go, Jules. But I do not think that Mr—
comment il s'appelle?"

"Peckover."

"No, I do not think Mr Peckover will want to see an old priest like me. I am not a novelty."

The boarding-house of Mère Grignon was called Belle Vue, and if she had been told that this was the most hackneyed name she could have chosen it would not have inspired Mère Grignon to find a more distinctive one. She attached more importance to the "Pension Grignon" that was painted under Belle Vue on the board nailed to her gate about half a mile beyond St Anne's church on the road going north to St Michael's. Certainly no boarding-house between Kent and Cornwall was better entitled to the name Belle Vue. The bungalow itself was commonplace enough with the usual verandah surrounding it and a roof of corrugated iron. The view was indeed enchanting across a semi-circular cove of golden sand rockbound on either side to the basaltic headland on the north-easterly face of L'Enfant Perdu, to the groves of coconut palms beyond and the jade-green sound of tranquil water between the little island and Assumption its ample-breasted mother. Neither Château Perrier nor the little house of the *régisseur* in which Jules Dumont had been born were visible from Belle Vue, and Belair itself, eight miles away to the south, was hidden by an arm of the bay, east of which Mont Diablé rose in a monotone of coconut palms to the darker primeval vegetation that clothed the last two hundred of its thousand metres.

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Northward the road from St Anne's followed the coast through low-lying country round the base of Mont St Michel until it turned to reach the eastern side of the island.

The gate at the top of the winding path that led down to the house between bushes of allspice was really the front door. When the visitor pealed a bell hanging beside the gate the whole household except Mère Grignon herself would bob out from the kitchen to receive him at the bottom of the path and escort him with a babble of hospitality up the steps of the verandah to the central room in the house, half dining-room, half lounge, where Mère Grignon on a cane-seated armchair would make an effort to rise and greet him but would always sink back defeated by her own corpulence. Yet in spite of that corpulence Mère Grignon somehow still retained the evidence of what had once been her beauty. She was dark but no darker than many a woman of Sicily or Spain. Her mouth above that triple chin was still a full Cupid's bow and her eyes were still lustrous, with laughter at the back of them.

"Ah, Monsieur Jules, what brings you to visit Mère Grignon?"

"I just wanted to give you a little present," Dumont spoke in Creole like herself as he offered her a box of Havana cigars. "I have been keeping them for you."

"Ah, so what I could find out for you has been useful?"

"Very useful. Any news of Marie-Louise?" Dumont asked. The mother of Marie-Louise shrugged her vast shoulders.

"If she comes back it will be because she has no money. And if she has no money it will be because she has no men. She was always lazy too. I am better with

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Claire and Claudine. I have learnt my lesson and I've been a little more severe with them. Young Gaston Vazelle was coming here too often after Claudine. That boy is mad about her, but she is not at all mad about him. She likes better Mr Tom. I think perhaps she may go with him to Petite Anse when he leaves the Pension Grignon. He may marry her. Who knows?"

"He's a bit old for Claudine. He must be over fifty."

"Claudine is seventeen. She is quite an old girl."

"I don't think Père Augustin will approve of such a match."

"Ah, Père Augustin, he is getting too old himself. One day at Mass he will trip over his beard. You will see. And Mr Tom is a very good man. He does not drink even a cup of coffee. Always water."

"I hope it's boiled."

"No, St Anne's water is good. It is the water of St Michel which is bad. And Mr Tom does not smoke," Mère Grignon added gratefully.

"That's lucky. You won't have to part with any of your cigars."

"And I think perhaps he will be the one to find the pirates' treasure."

"Mère Grignon, Mère Grignon," Dumont protested. "How old are you?"

"Past sixty."

"In that time you must have known at least a dozen people who were sure that they were going to find the pirates' treasure."

"But Mr Tom has a map."

"They all have maps," Dumont scoffed.

"But I think the treasure is on Turtle Island, and I think Mr Florimond is going to be his partner. They are talking now together in Mr Tom's room."

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At this moment Maurice Florimond and Tom Peckover came round the corner of the verandah into the central room.

"Ah, Dumont," Florimond said cordially, "have you met Mr Peckover yet? He's coming to spend a few days with me on Turtle. Why don't you come too?"

"Me?" Dumont exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, why not? I can't ask Mrs Dumont, I'm afraid. They're very much bachelor quarters."

"But you don't really want me," Dumont demurred. "You're just being pleasant."

"Look, Dumont," said Florimond, dropping his usual tone of light banter. "I'm serious. I was angry about what happened at the Club. Unfortunately I was away on Turtle when the election was held. But I gave my dear cousin Armand Vazelle a piece of my mind. I do wish you'd come for a day or two. Peckover is sure that Captain Bartholomew Roberts buried his hoard on Turtle, and if he finds it we shall want to have the legal authorities of the island on our side so that Henry Delorme doesn't try to collar it all for his Treasury. I do wish you'd come. You can have a comfortable bed, I always take my cook over with me, and he's quite a cook, believe me. I've still got some good claret, 'cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth' and all that sort of thing."

As Florimond rattled on Jules Dumont's surprise at the invitation changed into a sudden desire to accept it.

"Well, if you really mean it," he said. "I would like to come to Turtle. But not for more than a couple of nights?"

"That's splendid. Will you pick up Peckover here on Saturday morning and bring him along to Petite Anse where I'll have a boat waiting? Come in your oldest

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clothes. We'll do some fishing on the way over and scramble about the island when we get there. I'll bring you back on Monday morning to Petite Anse. Peckover wants to stay longer, but I expect you're too busy."

"Indeed, yes. I oughtn't really to take Saturday and Sunday off, but . . . this is awfully good of you, Florimond. It really is."

Florimond waved the goodness aside with a gay gesture.

As Jules Dumont got into his car to drive back to Belair he was thinking how glad he was Maurice Florimond had been away throughout the war and therefore that there was no likelihood of having to prosecute him for evasion of income-tax.

As the car was passing St Anne's Church two girls with baskets alighted from the bus that was bringing passengers back from the Belair market. Even in an island of many beautiful girls they were both of exceptional beauty. The elder of the two was tall and lissom with a carriage that would have made the average mannequin look like a puppet at the end of a wire. The younger was equally graceful but two or three inches shorter than her sister. Both had ivory complexions and an abundance of dark hair.

"Who was that in the auto, Claudine?" the elder of the two asked.

"I don't know," the other replied without interest. "He was old. I am tired of old men, Claire."

"All the same, Grand'mère says you *must* go to look after Mr Tom."

"Why must I go?" Claudine asked fretfully. "Why cannot you go, Claire?"

"Because Mr Tom wants *you*."

"But I don't want to look after an old man like that,"

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Claudine declared as she stamped the road with her shapely foot.

By the gate of Belle Vue Maurice Florimond was getting into his car.

"Hullo, you two girls," he said. "I'm arranging a holiday for you. Mr Peckover is coming to stay with me on Turtle for a week."

Claudine dropped her basket to clap her hands.

"When does he go, Monsieur?"

"Next Saturday."

Claudine's dark eyes glowed for an instant. "*Merci, Monsieur Florimond,*" she murmured. "*Au revoir.*"

Maurice Florimond looked at the young beauty, his eyebrows arched in a question. Then as he got into his car he said lightly over his shoulder what can be translated from Creole into Cockney as "if you can't be good be careful."

The two girls walked on down the winding path to Belle Vue.

"Ah, there you are," said Tom Peckover, who after vain attempts to make "Peckover" trip from the lips of the Assomptionnois had asked to be known as "Mr Tom". "Glad you got back before dark. I always feel a bit anxious when you're out by yourselves after dark."

"Why you feel anxious?" Claire asked.

"Oh, well, pretty girls, you know, and all that. I've just been telling your grandmother that I feel quite responsible for you."

"Why you feel that?" Claudine asked. "Me and Claire are quite O.K."

"Well, you know what I've told you about Doctor Buchman, and one of the things Dr Buchman is very strong about is the avoiding of temptation. Ness par que j'ai raisong, Madame Grignon?"

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Mère Grignon's treble chin was creased in a profound nod. She had set her heart on a marriage between her pensionnaire and her younger granddaughter, and until her hope was fulfilled she did not intend to disagree with anything that Mr Tom said. Middle-aged widowers who were contemplating matrimony with hot-blooded girls of seventeen needed continuous assurances of their wisdom.

At this moment a very fat man appeared through the bead-strung curtain between the Belle Vue main room and the verandah.

"Ah, I'm glad you've come along, Darkin," said Tom Peckover. "I'm afraid you've had it."

"What do you mean I've had it?" the newcomer exclaimed, sitting down with a grunt. Peter Darkin was now in his mid-sixties, but his completely hairless, deeply tanned crown above a plump face without a wrinkle might have been the head of a man twenty years younger, and his smooth legs emerging from a pair of shorts not much longer than bathing-drawers might have been those of a fat young man.

"I'm going over to Turtle Island on Saturday," Peckover announced, trying to keep a note of triumph out of his voice, because to exult over the mortification of a rival would have broken one of the precepts of moral rearmament. "And before a week is out I think I shall have that diamond cross the good people of Brazil intended as a present for the King of Portugal, not to mention the money—Portuguese moidores and Spanish doubloons up to any amount."

"I'm not worried," Darkin gurgled complacently. "I'm not worried because I know the treasure is where I think it is."

"You've been thinking it's where you think it is for over ten years now," Peckover reminded him.

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"I've been thinking it's where I think it is ever since the Kaiser's war when the skipper of the old *Venus* showed me the plan he had and asked me if I'd like to go shares with him when the war was over."

"And where's the plan now?"

"Ah, that's it. The plan went down with him in the old *Venus* when a U-boat got her in April 1917 and I was picked up ten days later and which I always said was what made me lose all my hair. But I remember enough of the skipper's plan to know I'm on the right track. And I've promised Miss Purslow if it is in her garden she shall have a tidy little sum for herself to put a stained glass east window in the pro-Cathedral."

"I'm afraid the pro-Cathedral will have to wait a long while for that window if Captain Bartholomew Roberts is going to finance it."

"All right, Peckover, all right. You have your little outing on Turtle Island, and you'll enjoy it. He's a very nice fellow is Maurice Florimond. I had the best cooked sucking-pig I ever ate over with him on Turtle just after he came back from Hitler's war."

"And Dumont is coming over too. I'm not taking any risks with him. You know what lawyers are. I don't want to find the treasure and then have the Government here thinking *they* can keep it. They'll get their share of course. And if Dumont's kept in the picture he won't try to be clever."

"I'm not going to argue about the treasure because there's nothing to argue about. I know. All the same I wouldn't like to quarrel with Dumont myself, and I've kept away from the Club for the last fortnight because I think they made a mistake over not electing Dumont after he'd been put up by the Governor. When I find the treasure, which I'm expecting to do at any moment

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now, I don't want to have H.E. clamping down on it. I haven't been looking for it for ten years to have it nationalized by these Labour blokes."

"You're quite right. But you needn't worry, Darkin, because it won't be you that finds the treasure."

While this talk was going on between the two treasure hunters Mère Grignon was placidly puffing away at one of the cigars given to her by the Acting Attorney-General. The smell of it was so good that Peter Darkin thought he would enjoy one; in order to inspire Mère Grignon's hospitality he produced a bottle of rum and asked one of the girls to bring along the glasses.

But Mère Grignon shook her head. "No, I don't drink rum."

"You don't drink rum, Mère Grignon? Since when?" Darkin asked in amazement.

"Mr Tom says it is bad."

Peckover could not resist letting a brief expression of triumph flicker across his gaunt beaky face. Such an example of moral rearmament surely justified it.

Mère Grignon was so depressed by having to refuse the rum in order to preserve Mr Tom's admiration that she did not offer Peter Darkin one of her cigars. Besides, Mr Tom did not approve of smoking any more than drinking. Thus to herself did she justify her unwillingness to part with a cigar.

"I didn't know you kept Lent so strictly, Peckover," said Peter Darkin.

"I don't pay any attention to Lent," he declared, and in his tone there was somehow an implication that the observance of Lent would involve a sectarianism that was against the principles of moral rearmament.

"I see," said Peter Darkin glumly. "You just spread it about over other people."

Chapter Eight

“**A**ND when are you going to take up your residence in Wilson’s bungalow?” Jules Dumont asked.

Peckover and he were sitting on a desiccated grassy bank above the sandy beach of Petite Anse watching the approach of Florimond’s boat that was now more than three-quarters of the way across from Turtle Island.

“In Chez Moi? That’s what I’m calling my little bungalow. I’m waiting for my bits and pieces to arrive. I bought some of Wilson’s furniture but I don’t want to move in until I have my really personal belongings round me. You see, I intend to make my permanent home in Assumption.”

“Even if you find the pirates’ treasure?” Dumont asked with a quizzical smile.

“When I find the treasure I shall feel it my duty to spend it on the island.”

“Mr Peckover, I believe you are a really honest man,” Dumont exclaimed.

“I try to be, at any rate.”

Dumont looked across to the small squat wooden bungalow on the low headland that bounded the southern side of the little bay.

“You’re looking at the remains of Wilson’s excavations,” said the new owner. “Where poor Wilson went wrong was in supposing that the plan he had was of the east side of Assumption when in fact it was of the east side of Turtle Island. Now the plan Wilson had, which I stipulated he should give me when I bought his bungalow, was undoubtedly accurate if only poor Wilson

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had realized he was working on the wrong island. I didn't realize that myself when I bought it from him after he came back to England. In fact it wasn't until last week that I realized it was on Turtle Island where we had to dig. That meant I had to take Maurice Florimond into my confidence and offer him a third of all we found. Luckily he's much more up and coming than most of these grong blongs as they call them."

Soon after this Florimond was hailing his guests from the bows of the *Swordfish*, and presently he brought the dinghy into the minute harbour beside which was his garage.

"You'd better put your car in with mine," he told Dumont. "I didn't bring *Swordfish* in because the harbour is full with three fishing-boats."

Turtle Island was a full seven miles out from Assumption and at least three times as large as L'Enfant Perdu.

"I don't know why I ever leave it," said the owner when they were sitting in deep wicker armchairs outside an unwallled gazebo just above a mile of sandy beach on which the Atlantic surf broke in thunderous rolls. Behind them was the garden of the old one-storied house. The golden afternoon deepened and the sands turned to the colour of apricots as the sun went down on the other side of the island. When twilight deepened dozens of terns flew in to roost in two enormous banyan-trees, the seeds of which kept falling on the corrugated iron roof of the gazebo; in the dusk they seemed covered with large white blossoms.

"They are the only banyans in Assumption," said Florimond. "My great-great-grandfather brought the seeds from Pondicherry. Fill up your glass, Dumont."

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And fill up yours, Peckover, even if it is only tonic-water."

Twilight turned to night; the terns instead of going to sleep chattered incessantly. The Great Bear was nosing down into the ocean in the north-east; the Southern Cross was rising. The beauty of the night was such that nobody seemed willing to interrupt it with conversation.

"I don't know why you ever do leave your island," Dumont said at last.

"If one stayed always here one might become a vegetable," Florimond replied.

"Do you think you will avoid that by spending most of your time in Belair?" Dumont asked.

"No, perhaps not, but one has the illusion of being busily occupied. Oh, one is occupied here. I have my baby turtles to protect."

He was alluding to the tanks in which were kept the baby turtles immediately after they were hatched so that they could grow a little bigger and reach the sea in safety. "I have to see that the copra is properly dried. We gather sixty thousand nuts a month. Then I have to see that the tobacco is properly dried. Oh, I have plenty to do when I come here and Belair seems quite a holiday resort. But come along, it is time for dinner. We are having turkey to-night, and we shall have sucking-pig to-morrow. And to-morrow morning, Peckover, we shall investigate the place where you think the pirates buried the loot."

"If I am right there should be a small headland jutting out into the ocean on the south-east side of the island."

"You are perfectly right, my dear Peckover. The Nez du Diable it is called. But it is completely covered in

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very prickly scrub and you'll need the devil's nose yourself to decide where you'll start digging."

"Oh, I shall have to do some careful exploration before I start digging."

"It will have to be very careful if you wish to avoid being scratched to pieces. But we'll talk about that to-morrow. Don't you even let yourself drink wine, Peckover?"

"No, I've given up alcohol in any form."

"Never mind, there will be all the more of some wonderful Château Margaux for you and me, Dumont."

The next morning Florimond and Dumont decided that it was too hot to accompany Peckover to the Devil's Nose. They sat in the gazebo and watched him trudging over the soft sand to the headland over a mile away.

"I don't think he'll find many pieces of eight this morning," said Florimond. "We shall be richer and cooler sitting here."

I hope you'll ask H.E. out for a week end on Turtle," Dumont said. "He'd enjoy it. So would Mrs Clapshaw."

"Turtle is no place for women. My father would never let my mother stay here. We used to have marvellous week-ends here when I was home from Cambridge for the Long Vac, but my mother always remained in Belair."

"And when you marry will you not allow your wife to come to Turtle?"

"If I did marry I would not let my wife come here, but I never shall marry. So that domestic problem will not arise."

"You sound very confident, but I've heard people talking like that about marriage before. And then they did marry. Don't you want children?"

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"If I had children I would not want them to live in Assumption, but also I do not want to live anywhere except in Assumption. So I am much better without children. You have no children yourself, Dumont."

"You can guess the reason."

"Yes, indeed I can, and I do not want to have children who will inherit a prejudice from which they cannot escape. Life here is too narrow. It is too far out of date."

"But you enjoy living here."

"Yes, that's just it. But it's a poor sort of life to lead to-day. I have surrendered to it, but let it come to an end with me."

"Who will inherit Turtle and your plantations?"

"Ah, that is what some of my cousins will be asking themselves for the rest of my life, and that is the reason why apart from the pleasure of your company I asked you to spend the week-end with me on Turtle. I want to leave all my land for the good of our people here. Not to the Church because that would seem that only those who were approved of would benefit. Not to the Government because that would mean more officials. I want you to think of a way by which *les enfants de l'île* can have some good from it. I would like to found a school, but what good would that do? It would just become another school for Monseigneur the Bishop and His Excellency the Governor and the Venerable Arch-deacon and the Director of Education to argue about when I am gone."

Dumont thought for a while.

"How would it be," he asked at last, "if you left your estate to be administered by a trust to provide the necessary funds to enable deserving Assumptionnois to emigrate to Brazil? No, perhaps it would be wiser not

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to specify any particular country, because I hope it will be many years before you'll be leaving your money and by then there might be more suitable places for them to go to than Brazil."

"I believe you are right, Dumont. I believe this could be the best way to leave my money. Now I want you to prepare the necessary deeds with . . . which notary?"

"I work most with Gaupin, but if you would prefer Bonnier. . . ."

"It's all the same to me," Florimond cut in quickly, "but perhaps it would be better to use Bonnier who has always dealt with contracts and things for me."

"Very well."

"But mind, Dumont, I want this to be a complete secret from my cousins at any remove."

"Of course. Of course."

"Armand and Yvonne Vazelle have such hopes that one day young Gaston will scoop the pool," Florimond murmured to himself.

While he and Dumont were discussing these legal matters Gaston Vazelle himself, carrying a palm, had just stopped at the west door of St Anne's Church to let his parents go ahead because he had seen Claire and Claudine, both carrying palms, approach.

"Listen, Gaston," said Claudine quickly as she passed him on her way in. "Mr Tom has gone away for a week to Turtle. I will be able to see you to-night if you can come with your boat."

"I can't come to-night," Gaston answered. "*Maman* has a dinner party. I'll come to-morrow night at eight o'clock."

Claudine nodded and was lost in the throng of worshippers all carrying palms. The interior of the church was a sea of palms. The high altar was covered

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with them. So too was the statue of the Sacred Heart, but the statues of Our Lady and of St Anne, her mother, were decked with sprays of purple bougainvillea. Père Augustin preached the sermon and the Mass was sung by Père Louis, a much younger priest. Neither of them gratified the underworld of Protestant belief about what happens in Catholic churches on Palm Sunday by riding round the church on a donkey. When the congregation came out from St Anne's, over on Turtle Island Tom Peckover had just reached the gazebo.

"I am quite satisfied that I have found the right place," he announced. "But of course the scrub is very thick and very prickly too."

"As your knees and arms proclaim," Florimond laughed.

"I wonder if you could spare me two of your chaps to cut some paths to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I can," Florimond replied. "And now all that your Buchmanship will allow you is tonic water."

"That's enough for anybody," Peckover declared.

"Except me and Dumont," Florimond laughed. "He and I are going to have swizzles. And I've got a treat for lunch. Oysters."

"I'm afraid I'm not much of a hand at oysters," Peckover said, shaking his head.

"Then there will be all the more for Dumont and me. Neither the walrus nor the carpenter was in the Oxford Group."

"Don't misunderstand me, Florimond. I've no moral objection to eating oysters. It's simply that I don't like them."

After lunch Florimond took his guests out in the *Swördfish*.

"See if you can catch a shark, Dumont."

Dumont's dark eyes flashed a rapid glance of interrogation. He fancied that Florimond was alluding to his income-tax investigations, but a moment later he decided that the remark was not intended to let him know that his host was aware of his investigation. He and Florimond each caught a couple of bonitos; Peckover declined to fish.

"I don't like taking life," he said.

"But you enjoyed the turkey last night."

"I shouldn't have enjoyed it if I'd had to wring its neck." Peckover replied. "Hullo, what are those two turtles doing?"

"They're making love."

"What an extraordinary performance!" Peckover exclaimed, gazing at the antics of the two turtles.

"No doubt turtles would say the same thing about us in similar circumstances," Florimond laughed.

Dumont went back to Belair on the following morning and Peckover, with two of Florimond's boys to help, set out to cut several paths through the prickly scrub of the Devil's Nose. It was nearly dusk before he returned to the house, covered with scratches and much exhausted.

"No treasure yet," his host commented.

"I don't expect to find it immediately," said Peckover. "It may take some weeks. I don't want to trespass too much on your hospitality. I was wondering if I might come over for a day or two every other week after I go back on Saturday. I shall bring my own stores and not be too much of a nuisance. It'll be easier when I move over to Petite Anse. I'll be able to hire a boat of my own. Did I tell you that I'm hoping Claudine will come along to look after me?"

"What does Mère Grignon say to that?"

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"Mère Grignon seems quite keen on the arrangement. And I think it will be good for Claudine. She's a very pretty girl, and I always think pretty girls are more exposed to temptation."

"A very profound thought," Florimond said with a hint of mockery.

"Yes, in one or two cases where I've known of girls stepping off the straight and narrow I've always noticed it has been the pretty ones who did it. So I daresay Mère Grignon is pleased that I shall be able to keep an eye on Claudine."

It was when Maurice Florimond and his guest were walking along to the house past the banyan trees a-blossom with terns in the moonshine like great magnolias that Claudine said to her sister.

"I'm going down now to meet Gaston. If Grand'mère asks where I am say that I had to go and see Michel about the sucking-pig for Easter. Tell her that Mr Tom is looking forward to it when he comes back."

"Where are you going to meet him?"

"Where I always used to meet him," said Claudine.

This was at the end of the outthrust of rock on the south side of the minute cove below Belle Vue. A few minutes later Claudine was scrambling down into Gaston Vazelle's canoe.

"*Comme je suis contente*," she sighed as she snuggled back in the bows. She was thinking how lovely it was to be looking at somebody with a modish moustache and young arms instead of at an old gaunt man with dull eyes and scraggy knees who wanted her to be buried on the other side of the island to cook for him and make his bed and listen to sermons in a language she could only half understand, not that she wanted to understand any more of it.

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"We have a long evening, Claudine," Gaston said, speaking in Creole. "My mother and my father have gone to dine at Government House."

Claudine clapped her hands with delight.

"Don't jump about like that or you'll upset the canoe," Gaston warned her. "The water is deep here, and you can't swim."

"I wish you could teach me to swim."

"I will give you a lesson to-night."

"But I have no bathing-dress."

"*Tant mieux*," he murmured.

And the tone of his voice pierced her like an arrow of love.

"Where are we going?" she asked in a whisper that was drowned by the muted splash of Gaston's paddle.

"What did you say?"

"Where are we going?" she asked again.

"To the cove on the north side of L'Enfant Perdu."

Claudine had been out with Gaston once or twice in his canoe, but he had never taken her over to the island where he lived. As he told her where they were going now she felt that she was being taken into paradise.

"I wonder who it was that told my father about my coming to Belle Vue. He was angry about it."

"Anybody could have told him. But it didn't matter because it would have been no fun with Mr Tom watching me all the time. Grand'mère has got into her head that he will marry me if I go to look after him at Petite Anse."

"He'll want to sleep with you anyway," Gaston prophesied.

"No, he will not do that. He has never tried to make love to me."

"He'd like to."

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"No. I do not think so."

"When I saw him the last time I came to Belle Vue he was looking at you as if he wanted to make love to you."

"That is not love. That is religion."

"Religion!" Gaston scoffed.

"Mr Tom is very religious. Oh, he is not a Catholic but he has a religion of his own. Only it is very boring to be told about it. But do not let us talk about Mr Tom."

The little beach to which Gaston brought Claudine was accessible only from the sea backed as it was by the sheer basaltic cliff at the north end of L'Enfant Perdu which curved round in dark columns to enclose a small slope of grey sand upon which the swelling half-moon did not shine. He brought the canoe round, jumped out and pulled it up on the beach.

"Now you can land without upsetting us. Bring the cushions with you. I'll bring the rug and the chocolates and the wine."

They sat for a while drinking out of the same glass champagne, a bottle of which Gaston had persuaded the butler to get for him out of the Château Perrier cellar. There was no breath of wind and the silence was intense except when it was broken by the distant roar of an Atlantic roller breaking upon the long strand on the other side of the island.

"I like this wine," said Claudine. "It is very good, I think."

Gaston pushed the empty bottle and the glass aside and gently pulled Claudine down beside him.

The Governor had not wanted to invite either Mr and Mrs Vazelle or Mr and Mrs Melette to dinner, but his wife had insisted that not to do so would suggest

he was, paying more attention to *Le Moniteur de Port Belair* or to the gossip about his putting the Melettes' coloured nurse beside him at tea than either deserved.

"Yes, but Esmée, won't they think I'm indulging in appeasement by asking them to dinner?" George Clapshaw objected.

"We can both make it very clear to them that we are not," she replied firmly, "By snubbing the Club we have snubbed all these ridiculous anachronisms. It would be undignified if we seemed to be sulking."

"I expect you're right," he said.

"I'm sure I'm right."

To the Governor's pleasure the electric fan failed to work properly at dinner.

"You're one of the directors of the electric company, Mr Vazelle," he said. "When are you going to get our electricity into proper working order?"

"Well, what with the war and the trouble we've had with labour . . ." Vazelle began.

"But I'm told that the electricity has been an Assumption problem for the last twenty years," the Governor growled.

"You should write one of your leaders about it, Mrs Vazelle," said the Governor's wife. "I'm sure you could rouse the electric company to a sense of its responsibility to the island."

"I am a director myself, madame," said Yvonne Vazelle frigidly.

"Are you, madame? I'm afraid that deprives us poor users of electricity of an eloquent champion. What a pity!"

"We have been trying for years to get the Government to help us over our difficulties," said Vazelle. "We

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would even welcome this nationalization which the present British Government seem so keen on.”

“With generous compensation to the shareholders, no doubt,” said Esmée Clapshaw.

“Naturally, the shareholders would have to be bought out at a fair price.”

“I’m afraid that dream won’t come true, Mr Vazelle. I shall have all my work cut out to persuade the Colonial Office to agree to the demands of the medical service here. By the way, I heard a story the other day which I hardly believe is true, but I should like to be able to contradict it. I’ve been told that when that excellent young dentist Carter from Guiana married the daughter of an old Assomptionnois family her parents were so much ashamed of the *mésalliance* that they have left the island and gone to live in South Africa.”

“It’s not surprising,” Etienne Mclette snapped. “He’s a mulatto.”

“So the story is true,” the Governor commented.

“But his dental practice does not seem to suffer. Most of you go to him.”

“One doesn’t choose one’s dentist for his social qualities,” Yvonne Vazelle said. “He is a good dentist. That’s enough. As a son-in-law he would be embarrassing.”

“You know, madame, when I hear you talk like that,” said Esmée Clapshaw, “I feel that I’m listening to a pterodactyl talking. You can’t hope to keep these out-of-date prejudices alive in one small island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.”

“I shall not argue with you, madame, because it is difficult for you to understand our feelings in a matter like this.”

“Yes, well, let’s change the subject,” said George

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Clapshaw, who with all the admiration, respect and affection he had for his wife felt that to tell a guest she was talking like a pterodactyl was going a little too far.

"It's ten o'clock. I think perhaps I ought to take you home, Claudine," said Gaston. "I've a feeling that my father and mother won't stay very long at Government House after dinner."

"When will I see you again?" she asked, snuggling closer.

"I don't know. If they're out again this week, but that's doubtful. I'll let you know."

Claudine fancied that he spoke coldly.

"Don't you want to see me again soon?"

"Of course I want to see you soon. It's been a perfect evening. Only you must realize that my father was angry when he heard I'd been going along to Belle Vue. And I don't want to annoy him because I want to go to Cambridge in the autumn and if he's annoyed he's quite capable of refusing to let me go."

"What is Cambridge?"

"It's a university."

"What is that?"

"Oh, Claudine, really it's too late to explain now. We must go back."

She threw her arms round him and held him close.

"You certainly know how to kiss," he said, when she released him from her passionate embrace.

"And so do you know how to kiss," she murmured, still in a trance of love.

"If I can possibly get away we'll kiss again this week, Claudine," he promised.

Fortune favoured them. M. and Mme Vazelle were out to dinner both on Wednesday and Thursday.

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On the way to church on the morning of Good Friday Claire said to her sister, "Mr Tom will be back to-morrow."

Claudine agreed gloomily.

"He will wonder what you have been doing when he sees your eyes."

"What is the matter with my eyes?"

"Ils sont cernés comme je ne sais pas quoi."

And indeed Claudine's eyes were as dark below as the rocks around that little beach.

Chapter Nine

WHEN Tom Peckover came in to the Port Belair Club at noon on the first of May he came prepared to stand drinks all round, excusing himself for choosing as his own lime juice and soda. Early that morning his cherished furniture and belongings had been safely landed and were to be transported that very afternoon to Petite Anse.

"It really is the merry month of May for me," he announced. "What's the matter with you all?" he asked when his offer of drinks all round was received with muttered refusals by half a dozen members in gloomy confabulation with one another.

"You'd hardly call it the merry month of May if you'd received a demand for arrears of income-tax up to £6000 and a further demand for £18,000 as a penalty for failing to make adequate returns over the last six years," said Armand Vazelle savagely.

"But of course you'll contest these demands?" Captain Fussell said.

"Naturally," said Étienne Melette. "I have already been in touch with Legendre, who says that this Dumont fellow must be mad. I have a demand for £16,850 and there are well over a dozen more of us. The sum total this lunatic is asking amounts to something like £200,000."

"Why are you grinning, Maurice?" his cousin asked angrily.

"Because I warned you, my dear Armand, that you'd probably regret the way you've treated Dumont since he came back to the island."

"You've taken good care to keep in with him, haven't

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you?" Vazelle sneered. "I suppose you're well in the clear."

"I was away during the war. Bonniér dealt with my financial affairs here . . . apparently to the satisfaction of the Inland Revenue. I could afford to be friendly with Dumont without being suspected of an ulterior motive. However, cheer up. Peckover here will unearth the pirates' treasure on Turtle, and when he does I'm sure he'll pay all your penalties."

Peckover on his third visit to Turtle a week ago had assured Florimond that when the prickly scrub on the Devil's Nose had been finally cleared he anticipated he should find the treasure within a fortnight. On this first of May, with the arrival of his belongings and the prospect of moving into Chez Moi very soon, he was going to hire a boat for himself. That would enable him to cross over to Turtle every day to carry on with the clearing of the scrub; the treasure was now so near to being discovered by his exuberant fancy that he was quite taken aback by Florimond's suggestion that he would settle the demands made upon the plantocracy by the Acting Attorney-General.

"I'm afraid I can't promise to pay out quite so much money as that," he demurred gravely.

"I don't think you need worry, Peckover," said Captain Fussell. "Poor Wilson was just as confident as you and was furious with me when I had to forbid him messing about with a lantern at night on account of possible enemy action."

"Wilson was on the wrong track," Peckover retorted.

"So are you on the wrong track," said Peter Darkin who had come into the Club in time to hear this last remark.

"It's you who are on the wrong track, Darkin. When

are you going to leave poor Miss Purslow's garden alone?"

"I'm a slower digger than you, Peckover. I'm an older man and I carry more weight. Bring me a swizzle, Tou-Tou," he added to the Club steward.

"If you stuck to lime-juice, Darkin, you'd soon bring your weight down," Peckover told him.

"Ah, but if I did my mind would shrink mentally as well as my body."

"If you imagine you'll find Captain Bartholomew Roberts' diamond cross by digging up poor Miss Purslow's garden in my humble opinion your mind has already begun to shrink."

Peter Darkin's fat belly wobbled in a silent chuckle.

"To show there's no ill will, Peckover, I'll stand you a glass of water. And I can't say fairer than that."

At this moment Robert Melrose came into the Club, and two or three of the members greeted him with enquiries whether he had received a demand for extra income-tax.

"Not so far."

"But you've heard about these monstrous demands which are being made?" Vazelle asked.

"I've been talking about them this morning to H.E. to see if he would intervene to stop their being taken into court. I'm afraid he wasn't encouraging."

"Wait till he sees what Yvonne has to say in the *Moniteur* about this," Vazelle snarled.

"Yvonne would be wise to say nothing while legal action is pending or you may find the paper in trouble for contempt of court," said Robert Melrose.

"I can't believe that the Chief Justice will support what amounts to a malicious prosecution," Vazelle expostulated.

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"There needn't be any prosecution if you all pay up," Maurice Florimond told his cousin.

If Armand Vazelle had not been still nursing a hope that his son Gaston would one day inherit a handsome share of the Florimond estates he might have struck his cousin for that last jibe.

"Pay up?" he repeated. "I'll not pay a farthing. There's bound to be a sane Government again in England before too long. Meanwhile, I can't believe that the Chief Justice will take this disgraceful business seriously."

"I can't understand why De Sousa has suddenly turned round like this," Melette said. "I always found him so reasonable. He always accepted my returns without questioning them. It's this devil Dumont. I'm sure De Sousa could never have thought of this penalty nonsense."

"Oh, well, if you get a Bolshie government this sort of thing is bound to happen," said Johnson, one of the English members. "They'll have trouble in Africa presently, you mark my words. Look at the way they've ratted in India. They can't grasp that the future of the world depends on the prosperity of the white race."

"But the white race has a moral duty to the coloured peoples," Peckover pointed out. "One of the great things about moral rearmament is. . . ."

"Oh, shut up about moral rearmament, Peckover," Johnson barked. "There's only one thing these coloured fellows understand—black, brown or yellow—and that's firmness. I'm not a pro-German. I fought against 'em in the Kaiser's war. But you've got to hand it to the Germans. They understand the meaning of the strong arm."

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"Yes, as I found out in the last war," said Florimond. "And it wasn't a very agreeable discovery."

"I'm with you, Johnson, up to a point," said Captain Fussell. "But only up to a point. We must distinguish between the strong arm and bullying. I couldn't have wished for a better lot of chaps than my Fencibles. I was firm with them, but I was always reasonable."

"Are you telling me that I'm a bully, Fussell?"

"No, of course I'm not telling you that, Johnson. Have a swizzle. Bring Mr Johnson a swizzle, Tou-Tou."

"I don't care what this Labour Government does in Africa," said Vazelle. "Assumption is not Africa. We've had no trouble with our people here except an occasional argument over wages. And why have we had no trouble? Because we have always known how to keep them in their place."

"You didn't manage to keep Jacques Grimoux in his place at the last election, Armand. He got your place on the Legislative Council. Times are changing, *mon cher*."

"Times may be changing elsewhere Maurice. They are not going to change here because the jumped-up grandson of a mulatto wants to throw his weight about as a jack-in-office. I admit I was carried away at first by my feelings when I got this preposterous demand. But obviously the whole business will fizzle out when it comes into court. Redrobe will do nothing. He wants to move on to a better post than he has here. He knows that if he rules against us we shall appeal, and if his findings are reversed by an appeal he'll know that it won't do his future any good."

Perhaps if Sir Charles Burton had still been the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption Chief Justice Redrobe might have decided to evade the issue by paying more attention to the warm arguments

put forward by Legendre and the other barristers retained for the defence than to the cold presentation of each case by the Acting Attorney-General. He decided, however, that the new Governor would not like to see his choice of an Acting Attorney-General implicitly criticized by adverse rulings from the Bench. He was hoping to become Chief Justice of British Guiana one day, or in moments of optimism even of Trinidad. He had his family to consider. Beau Séjour was the name of the residence allotted to him in Belair, and every time he saw the name it exasperated him.

"I'm so tired of Assumption, Edwin," his wife used to complain almost every day. "This house was never meant for six children. And the girls here are quite impossible. They've no sense of responsibility, and I can't keep my eye on Robin and Simon and Margery all the time. It's all I can do to manage Edna and Harold and little Wilfred. I do wish we could get back to the West Indies."

"All right, Agnes, all right," said the Chief Justice fretfully. "But do try to keep the children quiet after tea. I've a lot of work to do, and it's impossible to concentrate in this continuous racket that goes on."

"Edwin dear, it's not my fault. Robin and Simon and Margery come back from school and naturally they want to amuse themselves when they get home."

"Then they must amuse themselves quietly. I can't think why they want to go yelling all over the place in this heat."

"Why don't you go along now to the Club, Edwin? You can work so much better when the children are in bed."

The ferrety face of the Chief Justice was crumpled with irritation.

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"I don't want to go round to the Club while these confounded income-tax cases are being heard. One doesn't feel comfortable sitting about with people against whom one has just given a judgement for very large sums of money."

"No, dear, I see that," said Mrs Redrobe, a small faded blonde still clinging desperately to the end of her thirties. There was the sound of a tin trumpet being blown in the garden. Mrs Redrobe hurried to the french-window opening on to an arid lawn. "Robin! Robin!" she called. "Please don't go on blowing that trumpet. Your father is trying to work."

Robin Redrobe, on the edge of twelve, looked aggrieved.

"I was summoning Little John and Maid Marian," he protested.

"Very well, dear, but summon them farther away from the house. Down in the shrubbery would be a much better place to meet them."

"But I'm summoning them to Nottingham. I'm not summoning them to Sherwood, Mum."

"Do what your mother tells you," the Chief Justice exploded. "And don't argue about it, Robin."

"Well, if we go to Sherwood will you be the Sheriff of Nottingham, Dad, and come and try to arrest us."

"No, I will not. I'm busy."

At this moment with a shrill "walla, walla, walla," Simon, aged ten, and Margery, aged eight, came dashing across the lawn.

"You're not Indians, you fool," said Robin to his younger brother. "You're Little John and Maid Marian."

"Robin, don't call Simon that. It's a word I don't like to hear you use," Robin's mother pleaded.

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"Well, he is a fool," Robin insisted.

"No, I'm not," Simon contradicted. "It's you who are."

And dialectics being no longer effective the two boys came to blows.

Their father pulled them apart angrily. "Get away off to bed, both of you," he ordered.

"But, Dad, it isn't five o'clock yet," Robin protested.

"If they promise to be quiet, Edwin, and play at the other end of the garden, need they go to bed?"

The children retreated hurriedly before their mother's question could be answered with a negative.

"It's hopeless, Agnes," said the Chief Justice. "Every time I try to instil a bit of discipline into those two boys you take their part."

"Oh dear, I wish you could get transferred from this wretched island," Mrs Redrobe sighed.

The Chief Justice sat in his small study, asking himself again to what extent his future depended on his handling the cases that would come before him every day. If he dismissed the charges against these wealthy and until now apparently unassailable plantocrats to what extent would he be suspected of having been influenced behind the scenes? And influence might well be considered an euphemism for bribery. There could be no evidence of that, but a confidential report to the Colonial Office by the Governor might destroy any hope he had of obtaining one of the plums of the legal appointments. Merely to be transferred to another judgeship of similar status and salary to the one he now occupied would not solve his domestic problem. Yesterday Agnes had told him that she was almost sure that another baby was on the way. Life would become intolerable in Beau Séjour.

If on the other hand he ruled against these *grands*

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blancs with a century and a half of privilege behind them, would there not be a risk of an appeal that might end in his rulings being reversed? That might tell even more strongly against his hope of a better post. He wished that the Acting Attorney-General had included one or two of the British planters in his investigations. It was improbable that they were all innocent of falsifying their income-tax returns. Why did some colonies have income-tax and others none? Why could not Dumont have left well alone? Why did not the new Governor follow the pattern of his predecessors in using his term of office to consolidate his reputation for being a safe man unlikely to cause them trouble at home? Why had he himself ever gone in for the law? Out of perversity really, because his name was Redrobe and he had wanted to see if he really could become a judge. How much happier he would have been if like Dicky-bird, the Colonial Secretary, he was now in sight of a post a year or two hence that would be the prelude of a governorship. Why, why, had he gone in for the legal side of Colonial Administration? Why had he married, and why, why, why had he such a large family? And another coming. When Agnes said she was almost sure it always meant that she was perfectly sure. It might be clear enough that the income-tax returns had been underestimated, but would it be wise to exact such a heavy penalty? Yet if he was really to make an order that arrears should be met without penalties, Dumont was capable of working up a story that he had been got at.

The Chief Justice went to the door of his study.

"Agnes," he called. "Agnes!"

"What is it, Edwin?"

"Have you got any aspirin? My head is splitting."

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"Oh, I *am* sorry. The boys have been so quiet too since you told them to keep away from the house."

"The boys didn't give me this damnable headache. I'm worried, Agnes. I'm infernally worried."

As so often happens when people make up their minds not to compromise, Chief Justice Redrobe went to the other extreme and inflicted in every case before him the full penalty.

"We shall be ruined," Armand Vazelle said to Robert Melrose. . . . "What are we going to do?"

"You'll appeal, I take it?"

"Yes, of course, but somebody ought to tell the Colonial Office what really is the state of affairs on the island. This blasted Bolshie Governor will be giving them an utterly cock-eyed view of the situation. Didn't you say you expected to go home in June, Melrose?"

"I was thinking of it."

"Can't you make it a month earlier and give them a confidential report on this business. The *Aspasia* homeward bound is due next week. Can't you take a passage in her?"

"Well, there's no reason why I shouldn't go this month instead of next, Vazelle. If I can get a cabin I will go next week."

"Do you think that damned. . . ."

"Keep calm," Melrose interrupted. "If I'm going home to put the planters' case I don't want to hear bad language about H.E. Don't forget, my boy Archie is his A.D.C. I'll go quietly back to England and see what can be done."

While Vazelle was urging Robert Melrose to go home a month before he had intended to leave the island the Acting Attorney-General was up at Government House.

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"To be frank, sir," he was saying to the Governor, "I was agreeably surprised when the Chief Justice came down on them so heavily. I had always thought him disposed to favour the grands blancs. Indeed I must confess that once or twice I had suspected him of—er—how shall I put it?—of a material interest in finding against me when I was arguing the case for some poor devil who I thought had been deliberately framed because he was believed to be a potential agitator."

The Governor frowned.

"You oughtn't to say things like that even to me, Dumont. Suspicion is hardly enough to accuse a judge of bribery."

"I don't accuse him, sir. I was telling you how wrong my suspicions had been."

"Yes, well, but you'd be wise not to talk about suspicions."

"Only to you," Dumont said quickly.

"Even to me," His Excellency growled.

"I apologize, sir."

"Yes, well, the Chief Justice has ruled against them. You realize that this will mean an appeal."

"I'm not afraid of that."

"We shall see."

A day or two later Archie Melrose mentioned to the Governor that his father was going back to England next week in the *Aspasia*.

"I thought he wasn't going back till next month," Clapshaw said.

"I feel you ought to know, sir," said the A.D.C., "that my father thinks the Large Whites have had rather a raw deal. One after another of them has been to see him about this income-tax business."

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"And you fancy he's going home to put that point of view before them at the Colonial Office."

"I'm sure he is, sir. In fact I heard him say so. And don't think I'm being disloyal to my father. I told him I was going to tell you what he said."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He said he intended to tell you himself before he went."

"Ask him if he can dine at Government House to-night."

After dinner, when the coffee-cups had been taken away from the drawing-room, the Governor came to the point.

"You're going home in a few days, Mr Melrose?"

"Yes, I was able to get a passage in the *Aspasia*."

"And I understand that recent events here in the Court don't meet with your approval?"

"They do not. I feel that the penalties inflicted by the Chief Justice are out of all proportion to any offence that may have been unwittingly committed."

"Unwittingly?" the Governor repeated.

"Even if they were deliberately committed, which I do not believe. . . . May I speak my mind, Mr Clapshaw?"

"By all means."

"The general opinion on the island is that the Acting Attorney-General has been indulging in a personal vendetta against the various planters by whom he feels he has been slighted. Personally I was annoyed when he was rejected for membership by the Committee of the Club and did not hesitate to say so. I consider that your refusal to accept honorary membership of the Club was entirely justified."

"Are you really suggesting, Mr Melrose, that the

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Acting Attorney-General took action because he was not elected to the Port Belair Club, and that I encouraged him to do so?"

"No, I certainly don't think that, but I do think that he pressed the cases with unnecessary virulence and was obviously delighted when he won them. You are aware of what his background is here?"

"Perfectly."

"All too well aware," Esmée Clapshaw added emphatically.

"I know that you have had a wide experience of the West Indies," Melrose went on, "but Assumption is not considered of our West Indian islands."

The Governor cut in with some impatience.

"Yes, yes, you can afford to credit me with enough intelligence to realize that I know Assumption occupies a privileged position dating back to the time when we took it from the French but did not want to upset too much the feelings of the ancien régime. That policy has been maintained for nearly a century and a half. But it is time that these privileged people in a privileged island should learn that privilege brings with it certain responsibilities. To those responsibilities most of the grands blancs have been completely indifferent.

"I agree that some of them are a bit behind the times, but you will never get them to move with the times by letting them have a grievance," Melrose argued. "I have tried to set an example by paying fair wages to my workpeople without making the French planters suppose that I am trying thereby to help myself at their expense."

"I know that."

"But they are all worried by the policy of the present Government at home, which after all is not home for

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them, remember. They are worried by signs of discontent among the people here. This latest agitation among a few extremists to join Brazil amounts to nothing serious at the moment, but the planters feel that if it is not nipped in the bud it may get out of hand. They are worried by the amount of money being spent on education. They feel, and here the Roman Catholic Church is behind them, that if the people are educated beyond their needs they will become more discontented. To them Dumont is an example of unnecessary education."

"Dumont was at the same school as myself," the Governor chuckled. "Am I an example of unnecessary education?"

"Surely your background was very different from the background of Dumont," Melrose replied.

"I suppose you mean by background, blackground, Mr Melrose," Esmée Clapshaw exclaimed indignantly. "Do you mean to tell us that you believe in this myth of pure white blood possessing some kind of mystical superiority?"

"I was alluding to Mr Dumont's background *here*, Mrs Clapshaw. His father was the steward of Mrs Vazelle's mother. In his blood was the blood of emancipated slaves. For him to be in a position to prosecute a man like Armand Vazelle genuinely shocks them."

"But they are not shocked by a man like Armand Vazelle doing something that puts him in danger of prosecution," said the Governor. "And you feel it is *your* duty to let the Colonial Office know that my action in sanctioning the prosecution of these grands blancs is likely to stir up trouble here?"

"I think that they have been proceeded against with

undue severity," Melrose insisted. "And I shall feel it my duty to tell them at the Colonial Office that I think the appointment of Dumont as Acting Attorney-General was ill-advised."

"As one of the elected members of the Legislative Council and as one of the unofficial members nominated for the Executive Council by the Governor you will have a right to be heard and I appreciate your candour in telling me beforehand of the line you intend to take. I've had some experience in the past of Councillors who have not been so candid. Archie's father has a good deal of Archie in him if I may put it that way. Will you have a whisky?"

"Thanks, I will. Just a splash of soda."

The Governor poured out a generous dram. He felt that Melrose deserved one for his forthright attitude.

"Perhaps I should add, Mr Clapshaw, that the general feeling among the English people here is that Vazelle, Melette, Bergerot, and the rest of them have not been fairly treated."

"That's what the beachcombers and the treasure-hunters and the retired pensioners feel is it?" Esmée Clapshaw asked contemptuously.

"I was thinking more of the English planters, Mrs Clapshaw," Melrose told her.

"Oh, they feel that they ought to have been prosecuted, do they?" she asked with a sarcastic little laugh. "Well, we must hope that Archdeacon Dadwell won't understate the amount he received at his Easter collection."

"One of the things I shall do when I get to London," Melrose said, "is to represent very strongly to the Colonial Office that the income-tax position in Assumption is a complete anomaly."

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"The Treasury will win, Mr McIrose. The Treasury always wins. Well, I wish you a pleasant voyage. There are only two things I really should mind your saying about me at home. One is that I am trying to persuade the C.O. to sanction too much expenditure on the health service here and the other is that I am trying to persuade them to spend too much on education."

"He's an honest decent chap," the Governor observed to his wife when their guest was gone.

"All the same, George. I wish I was going home in the *Aspasia*," she said. "I've a feeling that one or two of the palaeolithic Tory backbenchers will be asking questions in the House, and I should like to be on the spot to explain the situation here to our people."

"Not even to provide the *Watchman* with an accurate picture of Assumption to-day, not even to give Martin Kingsley ammunition for an explosive leader can I bring myself to wish you were going home next week, Esmée."

"I don't want to go merely to get away from here, my dear. I'm enjoying it." She smiled at her husband affectionately.

"Do you mind if I spend a couple of nights on Turtle Island? I've a note from Maurice Florimond inviting me over for the week-end. He apologizes for not inviting you but explains that there is no accommodation there for ladies."

"Go by all means, George. I've a pile of letters to write for the mail. Is Florimond going to try to persuade you that he's a wronged man?"

"He doesn't have to. He's not one of the accused. He's going to show me where this treasure-hunter Peckover has been digging on his island. He's evidently much amused by the whole business."

MEZZOTINT

"I suppose Florimond is a queer."

"Esmée, really, you must not say things like that. No, no. Florimond's just an old-fashioned confirmed bachelor. There's nothing at all odd about him in any way. And what's more he's broad-minded and civilized."

"George, I didn't mean he was a practising queer. But the temperamental kind. In these days when spades are called spades the confirmed bachelor sounds so very Victorian."

Chapter Ten

FLORIMOND had been showing the Governor the clearance already made by Tom Peckover of the Devil's Nose on Turtle Island.

"I suppose it's all the merest fantasy," Clapshaw commented.

"Of course," Florimond replied. "But it keeps him happy. He's just got his furniture into Wilson's old bungalow which he has renamed *Chez Moi*. He's hired a boat to bring him over to Turtle every day to go on with his digging and every night he'll go to bed convinced that he'll go to bed the next night a rich man. His only worry now is that young Claudine doesn't want to come out to spend lonely laborious hours at Petite Anse looking after him."

"Who's young Claudine?"

"She and her older sister Claire are the two granddaughters of old Mère Grignon who keeps the pension at Belle Vue in St Anne's. Her own daughter Marie-Louise went off with somebody to Europe. The fathers of Claire and Claudine were birds of passage and unidentified. Mère Grignon is half and half and as big as Mont Diablé, but the two girls are absolute beauties. Mère Grignon hopes that Tom Peckover will marry Claudine. But I fancy Miss has other ideas."

"I'm not surprised," the Governor commented.

"Are you finding this soft sand a bore to walk on, sir? If we move nearer to the sea it will be harder."

Florimond took a half-turn to the right.

"Yes," he went on. "I understand that sweet seventeen is more interested in my young cousin Gaston

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Vazelle, than in a morally rearmed middle-aged widower searching for the booty of a teetotal Welsh pirate supposed to have been buried somewhere two hundred years ago."

"What does Gaston's father think about it?"

"He was furious with his boy. One evening at Château Perrier Gaston failed to account satisfactorily for his movements and I heard Armand letting rip at him. As you can guess Armand's equanimity is not conspicuous at the moment."

When they were seated in the gazebo at dusk, watching the white terns fly in to roost in the great banyan trees, Florimond returned to the subject of Gaston.

"I've no objection to a boy of nineteen having a love-affair with a lovely young Creole like Claudine, especially in Assumption where the girls think about nothing else except making love. But somehow I don't feel my young cousin will ever do any good. It may be the prejudice of a confirmed bachelor, but . . ." he paused.

Esmée's words came back to her husband; he smiled to himself.

"Why are you smiling, sir?"

"I was just smiling at the old-fashioned expression."

"It's justified in my case," Florimond assured his guest. "I'd made up my mind before I'd gone down from Cambridge never to get married. And how glad I was I had when the war came and I could throw myself into it with only myself to think about. And that brings me to something I want to let you know about, sir."

Florimond went on to tell the Governor what he had already told Dumont about the disposal of his estate.

"Your news is a great tonic to me, Florimond," the Governor declared. "I'm not likely to be still in this

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world when you leave it, but whatever else may happen during my governorship I shall always console myself in my retirement with the thought of what you have decided to do. Thanks very much for taking me into your confidence. And I'm particularly glad that you should have consulted Dumont. By the way, Melrose is going to England. He was frank with me and told me that he intended to insist at home that Dumont is conducting a vendetta against the grands blancs on account of their attitude to him. Tell me, Florimond, with equal frankness, what you feel about Dumont's action against some of your relations."

"I think they deserved a good shock, but I am not sure whether it might not be better to arrange a compromise, whether in fact it might be better to forgo the penalties."

"That isn't what happens at home with people who falsify their income-tax returns."

"No, but the circumstances here are so different from what they are at home that there is a fundamental injustice in putting income-tax in Assumption on exactly the same level as income-tax in England. There should be a standard method for imposing and collecting it in all the British Crown Colonies."

"We shall see what happens," said the Governor. "But meanwhile let me say once again how heartening it has been for me to hear about your plans for the future."

"You see, sir, I really love our people here. Sentimentally I would like them to remain as they are. But that is to gratify myself. If they want to better themselves they must be given the opportunity. It is too easy to lean back and say that they are quite content with what they have. Perhaps most of them are at present, but many are not,

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and those who are not content must be given the chance to compete in the great world beyond Assumption. It is the same story everywhere with the coloured people. We have taken their land in Africa, we have carried them away as slaves to the New World, we have emancipated them from slavery but we want to keep them in a permanent state of inferiority to ourselves. We salve our consciences by saying that it is impossible to grant negroes equal rights because they are not capable of governing themselves. One day perhaps they will be, but that one day is so far away and meanwhile let us take advantage of the cheap labour they give us and be grateful they are still so far away from the time when they can hope to assert their right as human beings that we can profitably exploit them until that time arrives."

"All that you're saying I've had at the back of my mind throughout my Colonial service," said Clapshaw. "And it has always been a black mark against me. Black mark is the word. I suppose deep down the white race is afraid of the future. When I was a small boy I remember asking myself why millions and millions of people in Asia and Africa allowed themselves to be governed by a few Europeans and I remember thinking that it must be almost as boring for them as it was for me to be still at school."

"Yes," Florimond agreed. "However good the school. As a matter of fact I quite enjoyed being at Harrow but I was jolly glad when the time came for me to leave."

"You must talk to my wife as you've been talking to me, Florimond, but I warn you that if you do she'll insist on your becoming a life member of the Democratic Union and that will mean a tenner."

"I was sorry that I could not ask Mrs Clapshaw to

stay on Turtle, but my father was determined to make it impossible for ladies and I have left it equally impossible. The sanitary arrangements are not exactly de luxe."

"No, they certainly aren't. I nearly fell into that great privy of yours last night when a black scorpion half as big as a lobster advanced against me at an inconvenient moment."

Maurice Florimond laughed.

"Our black scorpions are a speciality of Turtle, but I treat them as ruthlessly as a Boer farmer treats his black boys."

It was on the next morning when the Governor was going back to Belair that the belongings of Tom Peckover were being taken into Chez Moi.

"Ah, Peckover," Florimond called to him. "Where's Claudine? Isn't she helping you to move in?"

"It's not yet definitely settled whether she's coming to look after me. But I have my boat, and I shall be starting work again on the Devil's Nose to-morrow. We're nearer to the exact spot than I thought. Oh, good morning, sir. I was referring to the Roberts treasure."

"I realized that," the Governor told him. "I give you my good wishes, Mr Peckover, and I hope you'll be very happy in your new home."

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate your good wishes very much."

It was two or three hours after this that Peckover drove back to Belle Vue in the lorry which had brought his furniture to Petite Anse.

"Don't upset yourself, Mr Tom," Mère Grignon said in Creole, which was translated into English by Claire. Claudine will come with you to-morrow to Petite Anse."

"Where is she now?" Peckover asked.

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"I don't know just where she is at the moment, but don't upset yourself. Claudine will do what I tell her. She is a good girl, Mr Tom. She will make a very good wife for a man one day."

"I'm quite sure she will, Mère Grignon."

"What a fine thing it is, Mr Tom, when one can listen to a man with. . . ."

Mère Grignon tapped her forehead to show her appreciation of the brains within the gaunt head of her pensionnaire.

Claudine was down on the new jetty, watching the boat from L'Enfant Perdu approaching across the quiet green sound. Gaston was not on board. She asked the boatman where he was and was told he had gone into Belair earlier that morning. She decided to wait till he returned. At last he came just before two o'clock but to Claudine's despair his father was with him. Gaston scowled at her, fearing she was going to speak to him. Armand Vazelle turned and gave her an angry look, and she shrank back. Then as he was going down the steps to get aboard the boat Claudine ran forward and whispered desperately.

"Gaston, Gaston, for the love of God come to-night. I will wait where I always wait as soon as it is dark."

"If I can, if I can," Gaston muttered quickly before he hurried down the steps of the jetty after his father.

Claudine walked slowly back to Belle Vue. On the way she met Père Augustin.

"Ah, *ma fille*," he said, "you are looking very pre-occupied. What have you been doing with yourself lately?"

"Nothing, *mon père*. Nothing. Nothing."

"I thought you must have been very busy," the old priest said.

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"Pourquoi, mon père?"

"Because I have not seen you with the Children of Mary since Easter."

"My grandmother is always finding something for me to do."

"I hope she won't be finding something for you to do to-morrow evening. Père Louis will be talking to the Children of Mary, and I do not want him to tell me that he has a better attendance at St Michael's."

The old priest had seemed to speak more gravely than usual, and as Claudine walked on towards Belle Vue she wondered if he had been hearing some talk about Gaston and herself.

"There you are at last," Mr Tom said. "Well, I've got all my belongings safely over to Petite Anse and in another week you and I ought to be comfortably installed in Chez Moi. I've got a fine surprise for you. I've bought a car. It's a bit of an old boneshaker, but it will do for you and me, Claudine. You can learn to drive it and then you'll be able to go in to Belair and do our shopping. Nazim is sending it out this afternoon and I was wondering if you and Claire would like to have a drive into Belair with me."

"Not to-night," Claudine said quickly.

"Why, have you got something else you want to do?"

"I met Père Augustin just now."

"Oh, it's some religious business, is it? Then we'll go to-morrow evening. I don't want to interfere with your religious duties. You know that, don't you?"

"Listen, Mr Tom," Claudine suddenly cried in desperation. "I cannot come to look after you at Petite Anse. I cannot. I cannot."

"But why not?"

"Because I cannot."

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"That's not a reason. Why can't you?"

She looked at him. Something in the expression of those kind puzzled eyes urged her to tell Mr Tom the truth. Mr Tom, of all people! Even as she told him she was amazed at herself for doing so.

"I cannot come with you because I am going to have a baby."

"My poor child, that's terrible for you. Oh, well, we must help you through this trouble. And that's no reason why you shouldn't come to Petite Anse. I'll speak to your grandmother."

"No, no, Mr Tom. You mustn't tell her. You must not tell anybody. You must tell her that you do not want me to go to Petite Anse. Just that. Nothing more."

"But I do want you to go."

"Mr Tom, how can I come with you? Think what people will say."

"It doesn't matter what people will say, Claudine, when there are no grounds for what they are saying. I know what my duty is, and thank God, I have the moral strength to do my duty. I shan't say anything to your grandmother. You'll come with me to Petite Anse as was originally planned. Then later on we can decide what's the best thing to be done. Claudine, who is the father?"

"I cannot tell you that. I cannot tell you, Mr Tom."

"Is it Gaston Vazelle?"

"Oh, please, please do not ask me, Mr Tom. I don't know why I have told you anything."

"But I do know. It's because you feel you can trust me. I won't let you down. But I'm not going to give up the idea of your coming to Petite Anse. I think I see a way out of your trouble."

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"You mean you will get some medicine? But I have already taken medicine and it is no use."

"Claudine!"

The gaunt ungainly middle-aged man shook his finger at the what beside him looked like a figurine of alabaster.

"Claudine, how can you suppose I would do such a thing? Now, go and lie down and get yourself calm and collected. And remember this. I can see a decent way, a moral way out of your trouble."

It was after nine o'clock before Gaston arrived below Belle Vue in his canoe. Claudine, who by now was in a nervous state after waiting for him more than three hours, nearly capsized the little craft when she jumped in from a rocky ledge.

"Do be careful, Claudine," Gaston exclaimed irritably. "You nearly upset us."

"I wouldn't mind if I did," she said in a strange voice. "You can swim. I can't."

"Don't talk such rot," he said as he paddled the canoe out into the sound over the smooth starlit water.

Neither spoke for a minute or two.

"You're not very talkative to-night," Gaston said at last. "I thought you had something important to ask me. I had a job to get across, to-night, but luckily my father decided to go in to Belair. The mail is due to-morrow."

Still Claudine said nothing.

"Oh, for God's sake, Claudine! Are you going to sit there like a dummy? What's the matter with you?"

And still she said nothing.

"It's too late to go to our beach to-night," he muttered sulkily. "I'd better take you back to Belle Vue. Why did you make me come out if you're going to behave like this?"

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"Gaston!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Gaston, I am going to have a baby."

"You're trying to frighten me," he snapped.

"I'm not."

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"Sure."

"Haven't you done anything to get rid of it?"

"I have tried. But it was no use."

"*Mon Dieu*, you must go on trying. Don't you realize that my father will be absolutely furious with me? He may refuse to let me go to England this autumn. And I've been counting on that so much. You must try again. What *am* I going to do? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I was hoping it wasn't true, but yesterday I went to see a wise woman in St Michel who gave me pills to take before and she says I will have a baby for sure."

"And I really am the father?" Gaston asked suspiciously. "It isn't that freak Peckover, is it?"

"How can you say such a thing?" Claudine cried. "I have made love only with you."

"Don't talk so loud. Voices carry over the water on a quiet night like this."

Claudine began to weep.

"Crying won't help," the disconcerted young lover told her. "The best thing is for this wise woman to get rid of it by a surer way than pills. You didn't tell her I was the father?"

"I have told nobody that. And I shall not tell anybody."

"I hope you'll stick to that promise. I know it's partly my fault, but I'll have to pay for it more heavily than you if I'm found out. You'll only be one of many

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Assomptionnoises. After all, you told me once you don't even know who your own father was."

"How can you be so cruel, Gaston?"

"What do you want *me* to do? What *can* I do? If you want money for this wise woman I'll get hold of the money somehow. If you want money for yourself . . ."

"*Tais-toi,*" she cried in a sudden passion of hate. "*Tu es ignoble, tu es infecte.* I am not asking you for money. I did not give you myself for money."

"All right, all right," he said impatiently. "But what do you expect me to say?"

"*Tu as raison,*" she murmured half to herself in calm despair. "*Il n'y a rien à dire. Il n'y a rien à faire.* Take me back. I want to go home. It was my own fault."

"Oh, it wasn't entirely your fault, Claudine. It was partly mine," he allowed in an access of generosity inspired by her more reasonable attitude. "And if this wise woman can't manage to help you, and if the worst comes to the worst I'll always help. I daren't say anything to my father at the moment. He's in a bad mood because of what this fellow Dumont has been doing, and he might refuse to let me go to Cambridge in the autumn. But I'll tell him some day and I'm sure you'll be well looked after."

The canoe was headed for the rocks below Belle Vue and to Gaston's immense relief Claudine was apparently reconciled to the future.

"Here we are," Gaston said when the canoe was alongside the ledge.

Intendant Bowlby was received by Mr and Mrs Vazelle in the drawing-room of Château Perrier. He was a short stocky man with a square chin the strength

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of which was somehow reduced by the close-set somewhat shifty eyes above it.

"I'm sorry your boy has been brought into this sad business, Mr Vazelle," he said, "but it couldn't be avoided, I'm afraid. There's no doubt that he was the person who witnessed the accident, and I'm afraid I'll have to ask him a few questions."

"Do you want to see him alone, Intendant?"

"If you please, Mr Vazelle. I understand how you and Mrs Vazelle feel but you know how it is in a business like this. I wouldn't like it to be suggested that any kind of influence outside was being used."

"I'll send my son in to you," Vazelle said curtly.

There was no hint of a film star in Gaston's manner that morning; even his attenuated modish moustache seemed to drop.

"Now tell me just what did happen on Monday night."

"I'd taken Claudine Grignon out in my canoe. . . ."

"Have you been in the habit of taking her out at night?"

"I had taken her out once or twice, yes."

"I see. And then?"

"We came back to Belle Vue about nine, and when she was scrambling up the rocks where they stick out on the side of the cove she slipped and fell into the water. I was already paddling back to L'Enfant Perdu and I couldn't get back in time to help her into my canoe. I tried to grab her hair, but she just sank. I didn't know what to do at first, but finally I decided to paddle round to the jetty and then walk along from there to Belle Vue and tell them what had happened. Mr Peckover was like a madman. He shook his fist at me and shouted at me that it was all my fault and her sister Claire was in hysterics and Mère Grignon was

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bellowing. It was frightful. And then when I got home my father was in a terrific rage. I've had a frightful time."

"Yes, it must have been mighty unpleasant for you. How'old are you, Gaston?"

"I'll be nineteen next month."

"Well, it was obviously an accident. You didn't actually see her fall?"

"No, I told you. I was paddling back to L'Enfant Perdu as hard as I could."

"Quite. Oh well, I don't think there's anything more I want to ask you. You did your best to save her from drowning?"

"Of course I did."

"Yes, of course you did. Is your father there? Ah, Mr Vazelle I think your boy has given me all the facts I want. I'm sorry about this business. I know how unpleasant it must be for you. But it's just one of those things, as they say, and I don't think you'll hear any more about it."

Intendant Bowlby was wrong. While he had been visiting L'Enfant Perdu Tom Peckover had been to see Jules Dumont at Mon Espoir.

"Now look, Mr Dumont, there's something wrong. The day this happened Claudine told me she was going to have a baby. I asked her right out, 'Is Gaston Vazelle the father?' She didn't say 'yes', but she didn't say 'no'. And if he wasn't the father, why didn't she say 'no' right away? I told her it didn't matter about her going to have a baby. I said 'we'll find a way out of your trouble.' You see she was saying she couldn't come and look after me over at Petite Anse. And I said she could. What was in' my mind, Mr Dumont, was that I'd marry her and people could say what they liked. That's the way I'm made. If I feel I'm doing the right thing I

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don't care what people say. I didn't tell her that at the time in so many words because she was too upset. But I don't see why young Gaston Vazelle should get away with it. Mind you, I'm not prepared to say that he deliberately tipped her out of the boat. But I think it ought to be known that he had seduced her and that she was going to have a child by him and that if she tried to drown herself he was the one responsible. I made no bones about it when he came back to Belle Vue and said Claudine had been drowned. I asked him right out why he hadn't tried to save her. But I'd promised her I wouldn't tell her grandmother about her trouble and so I didn't say a word about it at the time. But I've been thinking over things since and I feel it's not right that somebody like young Vazelle should get away with it just because he's one of these grong blongs as they call them. So I made up my mind to give you the facts, Mr Dumont. I know there's no such thing as an inquest in Assumption. The authorities behind the scene decide what action to take in a case like this. Bowlby will try to smooth it all out because from what I hear of Bowlby he always does try to smooth out anything that's a bit awkward for those who have the upper hand in this island." Tom Peckover stopped for a moment and Dumont took advantage of the pause to speak.

"I shall think over very carefully what you have told me, Mr Peckover, and if I come to the conclusion that the matter should be carried further you may take it from me that the matter will be carried further."

"I was sure you'd give me a hearing, Mr Dumont. That's why I came up to tell you what I knew."

When Intendant Bowlby returned to his office from L'Enfant Perdu he found the Acting Attorney-General waiting for him.

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"It's about this Belle Vue business, Intendant," said Dumont. "What is the result of your visit to L'Enfant Perdu?"

"It's a sad affair, Mr Dumont. But it's one of those unfortunate things that happen. I don't think there's anything we need worry ourselves over."

"Did you know that Claudine Grignon was going to have a child?"

"No, I didn't know that, Mr Dumont. But it would be kinder, wouldn't it, to say nothing about it? We don't want to suggest that she deliberately took her own life."

"Or that she was murdered?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr Dumont?"

"You heard what I said, Intendant. If as I have reason to suspect young Gaston Vazelle was the father of this child her death was a convenience to him, and whether he pushed her into the sea or whether he took care not to save her when she either fell or threw herself into the sea it is murder. Do you still think there is nothing for us to worry about?"

"Even if you're right, Mr Dumont, about young Vazelle being the father, no jury would convict on the evidence we have."

"Perhaps not. But we have enough evidence to make it imperative for you to make further enquiries."

"Look, Mr Dumont, I know it's not my place to say this to you, but don't you think if we do go deeper into this it will be stirring up unnecessary trouble? The big pots among the French planters here are all feeling pretty sore about those income-tax claims. If you prosecute the son of one of the biggest pots of the lot for murder, or even if you only see to it that everybody knows what lay at the back of Claudine Grignon's death it's going to make it look more than ever like some

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personal grudge of your own against those big pots."

"And so you think I should be afraid of doing my duty, Intendant, because I might be accused of a personal motive for what I am doing?"

"No, Mr Dumont, I don't say that."

"Then be good enough to make further enquiries and let me have a report of them."

Dumont rose and walked to the door. Then he paused and turned to say:

"And let me have that report by to-morrow afternoon at latest, Intendant. When I have received it I shall decide what steps I shall take."

The report did not add anything to what Dumont already knew. Gaston Vazelle admitted that he and Claudine Grignon had been having a sort of love affair, but he denied all knowledge of her pregnancy and adhered to the account he had given of the accident. Intendant Bowlby added that he could not see the slightest prospect of taking criminal proceedings against Gaston Vazelle with the faintest hope of success.

That evening Isabella Dumont came into her husband's study to say that Madame Vazelle wished to speak to him.

"Madame Vazelle?" he repeated in amazement.

"*Sì, sì*, Jules. I was quite *sotto sopra* when I opened the door. She is in the *salone*."

"I'll go and see her. You stay here, Isabella."

When Dumont saw Madame Vazelle standing there in his own drawing-room he very nearly exclaimed in the agitation of his surprise "Yvonne!" but fortunately for his *amour propre* he ejaculated "Madame" instead.

"I have put my pride to sleep, monsieur, by calling on you like this, and you will have a right to humble me still further. But a mother cannot afford to be ruled by

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pride when the future of her only son is threatened. Gaston has been foolish, but it has been no more than the folly of just nineteen."

"And Claudine Grignon was seventeen."

Yvonne Vazelle flushed.

"Yes," she murmured. "I was seventeen, monsieur. I have no right to expect consideration from you, but I am here to ask a favour. I am here to beg you not to press these enquiries any further. I do not ask this for myself or my husband. Indeed, my husband does not know that I am here and would be angry with me if he did know. It is not for us that I make this request. It is for Gaston. Life is beginning for him."

"It was beginning for me when I was nineteen," Dumont said.

"I know that a wrong was done to you then."

"When you showed my letter to your mother," Dumont said bitterly.

"No, that, please, please believe me, I did not do. The letter was intercepted by my mother, and I took the easiest way out of her displeasure. Where I am more to blame is by the way I have behaved since you came back to Assumption. That you may find unforgivable. And yet I must remind you that you have had your revenge. I will be frank and say that I do not think it will be so complete as you hoped because I do not believe that the claims you have caused to be made upon us can be upheld. Let that pass. You have given us all a *mauvais quart d'heure*, and you know that. Is not that enough? Must you also ruin the future of my son? Can you not bring yourself to let this unhappy affair be forgotten? You will know what it has cost me to come here and plead to you. Could you ask for a sweeter revenge than that?"

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She leant back in her chair, pale and silent, while Dumont paced the room. And as he paced he was back again in boyhood walking with Yvonne along the yellow sands of L'Enfant Perdu. At last he turned and said:

"Madame, I shall instruct Intendant Bowlby that I do not consider any useful purpose will be served by carrying this wretched business any further."

"You will? How can I thank you?"

"By keeping quiet about this call. I do not want it to be rumoured around that I am susceptible to influence."

"I do not think anybody will say that, monsieur."

"Nevertheless you are all of you, *vous grands Blancs*, so much puffed up with your own importance that even you, madame, are quite capable of imagining soon that what for the moment *you* recognize as a favour was in reality a recognition by me of the subservience an octoroon owes to his superiors."

"I shall never think that, monsieur. I shall always be grateful."

"I wonder. But what does it matter? I have not done what I have for gratitude from you but to gratify myself. I have no illusions, madame."

"Nevertheless, I remain very grateful."

"Let me see you into your car."

When Dumont was back in the house his wife came to ask what Madame Vazelle wanted.

"A big thing for her, *Isabella mia*, but for me a . . . no, perhaps it was also a big thing for me. *Chi sa?*"

"You will not tell me?"

"No. If I tell you I shall be ashamed of my own weakness."

"But you say it was a big thing for you."

"*Cara mia Isabella*, we always like to cover up weakness with an illusion of strength."

Chapter Eleven

"I AM a little perturbed by what you have told me, Mr Melrose, more than a little perturbed."

Sir Walter Wilberforce, K.C.M.G., one of the two Deputy Under-Secretaries at the Colonial Office tapped his knuckles with a pair of those horn-rimmed spectacles which have done so much to provide our Higher Civil Servants with an appearance of impregnable sagacity.

"I told Mr Clapshaw before I left Assumption that I intended to raise the matter at the Colonial Office," Robert Melrose said. "I should not like you to think that I am lending myself to any kind of underhand intrigue, Sir Walter."

"No. Quite. Quite. I appreciate that. We have learnt always to pay attention, Mr Melrose, when you have been good enough to present any local problem as it appears to a prominent resident on the spot. Assumption is one of the smallest of our Crown Colonies and it is also one of the most remote, but that does not mean we can afford to overlook its importance. And you really think that the prosecution of those long-established and wealthy French planters' for alleged—er—inadequate returns of their incomes will have a bad effect?"

"I do, Sir Walter. There is already a growing spirit of discontent among the great majority of the Creole population, who feel that their labour is being exploited for the benefit of the few, and these prosecutions are giving agitators just what they want to stir up a more active discontent. I'm not going to argue for a moment that the people of Assumption have no grounds at all

for discontent. There is room for drastic improvement of the labour position. I have not been too popular myself with the French plantocracy by raising wages in my own plantations. But an open scandal, such as the confirmation of the findings of Chief Justice Redrobe could create, may well precipitate, unrest and play into the hands of those who are advocating this nonsense about joining Brazil, encouraged of course in this preposterous Argentine claim to the Falkland Islands."

"But there's no kind of justification for turning Assumption into a Brazilian irredenta," Sir Walter exclaimed in astonishment. "There certainly hasn't been a hint of it in Rio. The Brazilians are much too sensible."

"Yes, but one cannot foresee what may happen in the future, and I feel it would be the wisest policy for His Majesty's Government to do all in its power to convince the people of Assumption that they are better off under the British Crown than anywhere else in the world. It will undoubtedly be necessary to bring pressure upon the French plantocracy to recognize their duties and responsibilities, but I maintain that these prosecutions are not the way to do it. And that brings me to another point. I consider that Mr Clapshaw made a mistake in appointing somebody of Creole origin like Mr Dumont to be Acting Attorney-General and I believe that if his appointment as Attorney-General is confirmed, particularly, if I may venture to say so, if Chief Justice Redrobe remains in Assumption as Chief Justice, it is going to make things difficult all round. I must be frank and say that in my opinion Chief Justice Redrobe is not strong enough to stand up to Mr Dumont."

"That is rather a grave allegation, Mr Melrose."

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"I'm fully aware of that, Sir Walter, but please do not suppose that I am suggesting anything more serious than the influence of a very strong personality upon a weaker one. There is no suggestion whatever that Chief Justice Redrobe is not doing his duty as a fair-minded judge. The point I wish to make is that the Chief Justice is going to the other extreme of severity in order to convince himself that he is just as strong as the Acting Attorney-General. It is not my business to suggest a line of action for the Colonial Office and I hope you'll acquit me of seeming officious if I express a hope that Chief Justice Redrobe may be given an appointment elsewhere. Otherwise there will undoubtedly be an appeal to a higher Court and if Chief Justice Redrobe's decisions were reversed, as I feel sure they would be—well, I don't have to press that point. On the other hand if a new Chief Justice were appointed to Assumption at the same time as a new Attorney-General this income-tax business could be dealt with on its merits by means of a local appeal to the new Chief Justice."

"But if this chap Dumont is put out of his job won't he become a bit of a menace? Won't he be inclined to foment agitation? You say he's coloured."

"His grandmother was a mulatto, but he was educated in England at St James's School and called to the Bar at the Inner Temple. Over here we shouldn't even suspect his origins, but in Assumption the French plantocracy won't accept him. Only two or three months ago they wouldn't elect him to the Port Belair Club, although the Governor himself put him up for membership."

"He would," Sir Walter muttered to himself. "Well, we're grateful to you, Mr Melrose, for letting us know

the inside of this business in Assumption. I don't know, of course, what the Under-Secretary will decide. Sir William Goodliffe has a good deal on his plate with a new Minister and all that sort of thing. However, I'm sure whatever is decided will be decided for the best. By the way how did it happen that the Collector allowed himself to pass these inadequate returns if they really were inadequate?"

"I don't think poor De Sousa is to blame."

"Why, poor De Sousa?"

"He's been hoping in vain for a transfer to Ceylon which is long overdue, and he may have been rattled into this business by Dumont."

"I don't quite like the implication that the Chief Justice, the Collector and the Acting Attorney-General have entered into a pact to prosecute a number of wealthy French planters."

"No, no, Sir Walter, that is the last thing I want to suggest. I have no doubt whatever that there probably has been a certain amount of self-indulgence in estimating income during the war. All I am saying is that the swingeing penalties imposed were too severe in the circumstances and that a more lenient view is desirable for the sake of the island's future. I'm not presuming to suggest a line of action for the Colonial Office, but in the present state of the Empire, or rather Commonwealth as we are learning to call it, any indication of trouble in any Crown Colony, however small and however remote, is an encouragement to these infernal Communists."

"Yes, well we shall consider very carefully what you've told us, Mr Melrose. But you like your new Governor, in spite of his treading on the toes of the plantocrats?"

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"My only boy is his A.D.C., and he is devoted to him. I admire what he is trying to do for education and health. Incidentally, he has handled the R.C. Bishop very skilfully. I have told you nothing that I have not told Mr Clapshaw himself. I think that he is likely to prove one of the most successful Governors we have had if only. . . ." Melrose paused.

"If only what?" Sir Walter asked.

"If only he wouldn't let Mrs Clapshaw make it quite so obvious that she regards the planters as prehistoric survivals," Melrose said with a smile.

When Robert Melrose had gone the Deputy Under-Secretary telephoned to ask if the Permanent Under-Secretary could see him. Sir William Goodliffe, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., was available, and presently Sir William and Sir Walter were discussing what was to be done about the small and remote island of Assumption. It was the middle of the week and both men had recovered sufficiently from some strenuous golf over the week-end to apply the full vigour of their intelligence to the matter on hand.

"I've been thinking over what Melrose told me, Bill," Sir Walter said, "and it seems pretty clear that George Clapshaw is rushing ahead too fast. It's that confounded wife of his. I never expected she'd go out with him."

"It's a good job she did, Walter. If she were in London now we'd have had the Democratic Union picketing us."

"I think the best thing for us to do is to send this chap Redrobe to . . ." Sir Walter mentioned a colony far away from Assumption where the Chief Justice had died. "The Collector is overdue for a transfer. The sooner the better they are both moved, don't you agree?"

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Then the appeal can be heard in Assumption and I've no doubt a compromise can be reached."

"Yes, yes, a compromise is always best," Sir William agreed warmly.

"The real problem is this chap Dumont. Clapshaw, as you know, has asked us to confirm his appointment as Attorney-General; it is my opinion that he's not the right man. After all, one doesn't want a firebrand as Attorney-General."

"Certainly not."

"And of course he's of the country."

"Black?"

"No, no. There's only coloured blood a generation back. I believe he's a very capable fellow but these grands blancs as they call them. . . ."

"What on earth are they?" Sir William asked.

"They're the descendants of the French planters who were there when we bagged the island from Napoleon. And we've always made a great point of respecting their privileges."

"I know that, but I didn't know they were called grands blancs. Large Whites, eh? Sounds like butterflies."

"Yes, or pigs," Sir Walter added. "Well, as I was saying, these grands blancs are adamant about the colour bar and they've been badly upset by Clapshaw's making this chap Dumont Acting Attorney-General. I gather that there's another barrister there who would have been recommended by Charles Burton for the job. I forget his name for the moment but I'll get Daveney to look it up. Yes, and there's young Marson, he'll know. I propose we make this chap Attorney-General. Clapshaw won't like it, but we can soften the blow by agreeing to some of his recommendations about health

and education. Not all of them, mind you, or we'll have the Treasury squawking. But we must do something or we'll have some of those Tory back-benchers on the warpath. Melrose as good as warned me that one or two of these Old Harrovian grands blancs were preparing ammunition for the right of the line over here, and that means these earnest Old Wykehamists on the left will be shooting back, and before we know where we are the *Daily Excess* will be saying that the Colonial Office is a greater menace to the future of the Commonwealth than the British Council.

"Yes, I'm sure you're right, Walter," Sir William agreed, and by an instinctive gesture both the Permanent Under-Secretary and the Deputy Under-Secretary put on their horn-rimmed spectacles, thus proclaiming that wisdom ruled their decisions.

Away in Assumption a week later Arnold Richardson, the Colonial Secretary, apprised the Governor of the impending departure of Chief Justice Redrobe and Miguel De Sousa.

"Both are moving to where they'll get higher wages than here, sir," he said with a grin. "But it looks as if this income-tax business will drag on. My guess is that the new Chief Justice, whoever he is, will order a re-trial."

"Yes, that's obviously the idea. And I've had no confirmation yet of Dumont's appointment as Attorney-General. Well, if my recommendation is turned down I shall resign."

"Sir!"

"My wife's going home by the June packet. If they refuse to confirm Dumont's appointment I shall go with her."

However, no word came from the Colonial Office before the day Esmée was to leave.

"Wait until you hear from me, George, before you do anything. Promise me that," she begged her husband.

And the promise was given.

The news that Chief Justice Redrobe was going to another Colony was welcomed by the Acting Attorney-General for one reason; it postponed a libel action against Tom Peckover which Armand Vazelle was threatening to bring on behalf of his son Gaston. Dumont had done all he could to dissuade Peckover from wild talk, but for him the prospect of finding the pirates' treasure on Turtle Island had been swallowed up by another obsession, which was that Claudine had been murdered by Gaston Vazelle. It was useless for Dumont to insist that there had not been the least evidence to warrant the young man's arrest.

"I tell you, Mr Dumont, that I know he pushed her out of the canoe. I know it as well as if I'd seen him do it with my own eyes. And *you* know he did it. What made you suddenly change your mind about charging him with the crime?"

"Lack of evidence, lack of evidence," Dumont kept insisting to the gaunt man who came rushing up to Mon Espoir in the tumbledown car he had bought for Claudine to learn how to drive to do her marketing in Belair. "You must curb your tongue. If you go on like this Vazelle will sue you for libel, and I could do nothing for you. I should have to stand aside. Moreover, if you went on making these accusations, as Attorney-General I might have to proceed against you for criminal libel."

"You're all alike here," Peckover would rant. "Every single one of you. The place stinks of corruption. It would be as easy to morally rearm Hell itself as it would be to morally rearm this island. A girl of seventeen is seduced and murdered and the whole bloody lot of you

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do nothing about it. Yes, you can be very active when it's a case of extracting money out of the big 'nobs here, but when it's a question of investigating the death of a motherless girl you do nothing."

Dumont tried to get Maurice Florimond to help quieten Tom Peckover.

"Can't you keep him on Turtle until he gets over this obsession?"

"I've done all I could, Dumont. I even came over with some old coins which I said I'd found on Nez du Diable in the hope of getting him back to work on the treasure, but he knocked them out of my hand and said he wouldn't turn a spadeful of earth until Claudine's murderer was brought to justice. And now a rumour has gone round the island that *I* have discovered the pirates' treasure. Peter Darkin has stopped digging up poor Miss Purslow's garden and wants to be allowed to dig on Turtle, and when I told him I'd only found a few odd pieces of gold he winked and told me he quite understood but warned me that Pettiward had given orders for all passengers' luggage leaving the island to be searched in case they were trying to smuggle out the pirates' treasure."

It was half-way through July when George Clapshaw received a personal letter from Sir Walter Wilberforce:

Dear Clapshaw,

I am writing to you unofficially to let you know about one or two decisions that have been taken here. You already know that Chief Justice Redrobe is to be replaced by Keable, one of the Puisne Judges in Trinidad. He'll be leaving as soon as possible but we have to give him a couple of months' leave at home and he'll hardly be able to arrive in Assumption before October.

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That means this income-tax case will have to remain in abeyance for the time being which is perhaps just as well because it will give time for a cooler approach to the business. The new Collector should be arriving at the same time as this letter. He's never done any service in the tropics. So it'll take him a bit of time to get a grasp of things. However, Delorme will be able to explain the way things go in Assumption.

And now I'm afraid I have a disappointment for you. After carefully considering your recommendation of Mr Jules Dumont for the post of Attorney-General we have come to the conclusion that such an appointment might add fuel to what is already a potentially inflammable situation. We have no doubt of Mr Dumont's legal ability, but we feel that it would be a mistake to make an appointment that would inevitably stir up bad feeling among the French planters.

As nobody knows better than you it has always been our policy to do nothing that would needlessly disturb the status quo. I quite realize that you may find the French planters rather behind the times in their point of view, but we have had to look at this from their angle as well as from our own and this must entail a certain amount of give and take on both sides.

Frankly we feel that Mr Dumont is prejudiced for various reasons against the plantocracy, and that if we were to agree to his appointment as Attorney-General we should seem to be taking sides and that you will agree is something which above all we must avoid. I know that you have formed a high opinion of Mr Dumont and I do hope you will realize that our decision about his appointment as Attorney-General does not imply the slightest criticism of that opinion. You can count on us to do our best to find the ways and means to carry out as far as is feasible your admirable suggestions about health and education.

I am sorry that your first months in Assumption have been complicated by these little problems, but an old hand like yourself will have been prepared for little problems and will

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have taken them in your stride. Do let me have a purely personal letter to say that you appreciate our difficulties here,' and that you agree with us in thinking that Mr Dumont in present circumstances is not the right appointment as Attorney-General.

With my regards.

Yours sincerely,

Walter Wilberforce

George Clapshaw was dispirited by that letter, and the absence of Esmée from Government House added acute loneliness to his depression. To her he wrote:

Dearest Esmée,

As you have probably heard by now from Walter Wilberforce the Colonial Office refuses to confirm the appointment of Jules Dumont. I have not seen him yet to break the news and at the moment he is being badgered by that lunatic treasure-hunter Peckover, who suspects him of being in league with the grands blancs because he refuses to indict young Gaston Vazelle for the murder of that unfortunate girl who was found drowned.

I miss you very much. I feel that the only course for me is to resign from the Service. Tell me what you think when next you write. Or better still send a cable with 'yes' or 'no'. After all, it's you who have the private means, and my pension won't be a fat one. I'm sure I'll be able to pick up some kind of a job and I've had enough experience to write at least one interesting book. Fortunately, one doesn't have to be a good writer nowadays to be read by a public accustomed for most of its reading to journalese. I can certainly do useful work for the D.U.

I'd rather you didn't stir up your friends in the Government. The last part I wish to play is the part of the man with a grievance. I think I might have made a good job of it here, but it's obvious that the C.O. regard me as a trouble-maker and have been frightened by the picture Melrose must have given

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them. It was foolish of me to suppose that I could do any more as a Governor than as a District Officer or a Colonial Secretary once upon a time, and I'm hoping that cable of yours will say 'yes'. You won't ever be Lady Clapshaw but I've a notion you won't mind a lot about that!

The truth is, my dear, that I'm top tall. Six feet five and a half and broad in proportion. No man can carry all that physical weight and expect to exert any substantial moral weight, even less any intellectual weight. The elephant is proverbially sagacious but I don't believe he's nearly as intelligent as a toy poodle.

You've seen me go shambling along now for twenty-five years and fortunately for yourself you could always go jumping ahead and do what you wanted to do. I was surprised and a bit elated when they made me H.E. the Governor and Commander-in-Chief and when you gallantly decided to come out here with me I thought I was going to put right such a lot of things. Well, I thought wrong, but what worries me most is letting down poor Dumont. I know it's not really my fault except that I never ought to have let him think that his appointment as Attorney-General would automatically be confirmed. I should have told him that I would try for it but that I doubted if I should succeed. I'm worrying about his future. Legendre is sure to get the job and he'll make it as difficult as he knows how for Dumont.

I wish I could be talking to you at this moment instead of scrawling away to you on paper. These five months with you in Assumption have made me realize more than ever how dear you are to me, but if you tell me not to resign don't think that I shall plague you to stay with me here all the time. I know you wouldn't be able to stand the perpetual thwarting it's bound to mean. The work you do at home is too valuable for you to be wasted here. I love you very very much.

*Always,
George*

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Once again please don't stir up Labour backbenchers to ask questions in the House if I do resign.

When he had finished the letter to his wife the Governor decided it would not be fair to withhold the bad news from Dumont, and he told Archie Melrose to take the car and bring him from his office to Government House.

"I'm not going to beat about the bush, Dumont. The news from London is bad. I was half-expecting it when Redrobe and De Sousa were transferred but I was still hoping. By this mail I've had a letter from Sir Walter Wilberforce in which he tells me that they will not confirm your appointment as Attorney-General. Of course, I am to understand that this refusal is no reflection upon your legal ability. It is to be regarded purely as part of the policy which the Colonial Office want to carry out in Assumption. I have written to my wife to tell her that I want to resign my post but I have thought it fair to her to hear of my desire before I finally notify the Secretary of State. I have asked her to cable me "yes" or "no". She should get my letter in about a fortnight and meanwhile you will of course continue as Acting Attorney-General. I feel pretty sure that Legendre will get the job. I know Sir Charles Burton intended to recommend him but did not do so formally before I was made Governor. I'm sorry about this, Dumont. I had been looking forward to my term of office with you as my Attorney-General."

Dumont had neither uttered a sound nor blinked an eye, while the Governor had been speaking. Now with tight lips and eyes hard as ebony he still sat silent.

"Meanwhile, I am still to carry on as Acting Attorney-General?" he asked at last.

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"Most certainly. Once again let me say how deeply sorry I am about this."

"I know that, sir."

"Well, I expect you'll want to be getting back to your office," the Governor mumbled awkwardly.

"Yes, there are one or two things I want to do while I'm still Acting Attorney-General," Dumont said, and as he spoke his lips tightened again and his eyes hardened.

When Dumont was back in his office he sent a note to say he wanted to see the Intendant of Police immediately.

"I've been thinking over the Claudine Grignon case," he told the Intendant when he arrived.

"I know," said Bowlby. "Something's got to be done to stop this fellow Peckover from opening his mouth all over the place. I've advised Vazelle to sling in a writ for libel."

"You have, have you? It was bad advice because I intend to have young Gaston Vazelle charged."

"What?"

"You heard what I said."

"But there's no evidence to justify such a charge."

"I am the best judge of that, Intendant."

"No jury would give you a verdict."

"We shall see."

"Look here, Mr Dumont, the police won't help you over this."

"You mean *you* won't help me, Intendant. That will enable me to draw attention to what I consider is your unsuitability for the post you now occupy."

"I'm not going to stand for talk like that from a half-caste lawyer," said the Intendant truculently, the veins in his thick neck swelling. "No, not if he does have the ear of our socialist Governor. I'll. . . ."

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"It's fair to let you know, Intendant, that my clerk in the next room is taking down your conversation in shorthand. And finding no difficulty in hearing what you say, let me add. By the way, Mr Peckover informs me that you have threatened him with unpleasantness if he does not keep his mouth shut. You mustn't think that because your career began as a Black and Tan during the Irish troubles you can continue as you started.

"Black and Tan! You're a good one to talk about black and tan, I don't think."

"I sent for you to let you know what I intend to do. You've heard. Now get out."

The bitterness of his disappointment welled up again in Jules Dumont when he got out of his battered old car at Mon Espoir that evening.

"Just as well I didn't buy De Sousa's car after all," he said to Isabella when she came along the garden path to meet him.

"Why are you saying that, Jules?"

"Because Mon Espoir has turned into Mon Désespoir, Isabella mia. I am not going to be Attorney-General. H.E. has just heard from the Colonial Office that they will not confirm the appointment. So we shall soon be back again where we were. However, I'm still Acting Attorney-General until Legendre steps into my shoes and I'll pay them out for what they've done to me. Listen, *cara mia*, I never told you what Yvonne Vazelle wanted from me that evening she came to our house. She wanted me to call off the investigation into the death of Claudine Grignon and I was weak enough to agree. That did not stop her and the rest of her friends from intriguing to prevent my becoming Attorney-General. Anything to save their purses! All right, but I am still Acting Attorney-General and I can still

MEZZOTINT

punish them by ordering a fresh investigation of the suspicions against Gaston Vazelle."

"But do you really believe that he made the death of that sad girl."

"She was going to have a baby. He may not have deliberately drowned her but her death was for him a great convenience and he did not save her life. He may not have tried to save it. That will be for a jury to decide. But whether he is found guilty or not guilty the pride of the Vazelles will have been mortally wounded. Mortally, mortally."

"You cannot do this, Jules," Isabella Dumont declared passionately. "Even if you believe that he drowned her for purpose, and I do not think you do believe that, it is too late now for you to do anything. Now it can only seem that you were trying to revenge yourself because you have lost your—*come si dice?*—your position. *Così* you make yourself like them. Do not do this thing, *ti prego, ti prego*. You are so splendid to me and you would not be so splendid if you did this. Leave these people, leave them—how is the English expression—leave them to boil in their own juice."

Dumont laughed, and the laughter was an anodyne.

"You are right, Isabella, I shall leave them to roast in their own juice."

"Ah, you laugh because I say 'boil' instead of 'roast'."

He laughed again.

"Am I still splendid to you?"

"You are all my life, Jules," she murmured softly in his arms.

It was on the last day of July that a cable came from Esmée Clapshaw with two words:

MEZZOTINT

“Bravo yes”

By the next mail the Governor wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies to resign his post.

By the same mail he wrote to Sir Walter Wilberforce privately:

Dear Wilberforce,

I have notified the Secretary of State that I wish to resign from the Governorship of Assumption. Your letter made it clear to me that I cannot expect to be supported by the Colonial Office in the policy I believe to be right for this small island far away in the South Atlantic.

It is evident that by transferring Chief Justice Redrobe you are hoping that Chief Justice Keable when he arrives will find some way of saving face all round over the income-tax business, but in spite of your assurances to the contrary I feel that the refusal to confirm the appointment of Mr Jules Dumont as Attorney-General implies a censure upon myself. I recommended him because I believed him (and still believe him) to be the best man for the job. Whatever Charles Burton may think, Legendre is not. While I am on the subject of transfers, etc., may I suggest that you transfer the present Intendant of Police and Excise? I won't trouble you with my reasons for this suggestion because no doubt you will pay as little attention to my recommendation to shift Intendant Bowlby as to my recommendation to appoint Mr Dumont to be Attorney-General.

I take it that my successor will be arriving here just in time for the worst of the rainy season and I trust I shall be able to come home at latest by the October boat. I'd prefer to leave in September.

My resignation from the Governorship means my resignation from the Colonial Service. So I shall not be hanging around Smith Street unemployed and unemployable, and you'll have a K in hand for the Colonial Office list in the New Year Honours.

MEZZOTINT

And do not suppose that I shall be a man with a grievance who will set out to criticize the C.O. for not knowing how to handle the Colonial problems that one after another all over the world are going to make the next ten years a nightmare.

I think that the great handicap from which the Colonial Office has suffered during this century has been that the really first-raters all went to India or Egypt and that we have had what was left over. Like myself!

Yours sincerely,

George Clapshaw

On an evening in the first week of October George Clapshaw gave his last dinner-party in Government House. The guests were Jules Dumont with his wife and Maurice Florimond. It was just before they were leaving that Dumont said:

"Well, sir, I made up my mind to-day that Isabella and I would go back to Demarara. I don't think I'll be able to do much good here for our people with Legendre as Attorney-General. I can help them in Guiana. There'll be a struggle there soon. And then perhaps later we'll come to England "

"Yes. You'll soon be wanted by the Democratic Union. My wife urged me to insist upon that," Clapshaw told him.

"A wonderful woman."

"That's what you said to me just a year ago, Dumont. Good-bye, Mrs Dumont. I shan't be seeing you to-morrow at the harbour. You've been a wonderful woman too. You're coming down to the harbour, Florimond, you say. I shall miss Turtle Island. I'm glad you've persuaded poor Peckover to take up his abode there and go on digging for the pirates' gold. I was beginning to fear for his mind."

MEZZOFINT

"He'll soon be himself again, sir," said Florimond. "And I've persuaded my cousin to call off that libel action."

"How did you do that?" Clapshaw asked.

"Oh, just a little hint that I might do what I really am going to do. Not quite cricket, eh? But, never mind, we don't play cricket in Assumption."

It was in teeming tropical rain that the ex-Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption drove down with his A.D.C. to the harbour of Belair where the Governor's pinnace was waiting to take him out to the *Aspasia*.

"I'm frightfully sick that you're going, sir," Archie Mcrose said suddenly. "I had rather a row with my father about it last night."

"It wasn't your father's doing, Archie."

"He's too anxious for everybody to get on with everybody else."

"He shares that anxiety with the Colonial Office. Well, Archie, thanks for your help during these months. I hope you'll look after my successor as well as you've looked after me."

"I'm not going on as A.D.C., sir."

"I think you ought to."

"No, sir. I told my father so last night. I wish I were coming with you to England. But I suppose I'll have to spend the rest of my life here."

"You can do an awful lot of good here, Archie. You like Maurice Florimond, don't you?"

"Yes, very much. I'm going to stay on Turtle next week."

"Cultivate him. He has the right ideas. God bless you, my boy."

MEZZOTINT

An hour later George Clapshaw on board the R.M.S.P. *Aspasia* was watching the Island of Assumption disappearing astern, a mere green blur in the rain.

It was a blue and white day in St Luke's little summer when the ex-Governor and his wife drove from Waterloo to that trim little eighteenth-century house in Hampstead.

"It was just such weather as this a year ago when I heard I was to be Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Assumption," said George Clapshaw. "You're sure you think I was right to resign my post?"

"Absolutely sure, George. And soon they'll be sorry you're not still there."

"I'm not so sure about that. Laissez-faire may find in Assumption its last ditch. What really worries me, though, is whether you're going to enjoy having me around on perpetual leave."

"Don't worry about that. I shall find plenty for you to do."

"Not about the house?" Clapshaw asked anxiously.

"Oh, my god, no! But the D.U. wants you to go out to Nyasaland. We think our people may be giving in too easily to these Rhodesians."

He sighed.

"Don't you want to go to Nyasaland, George?"

"Of course I do," the ex-Governor of Assumption replied. "I sighed for a moment, thinking about Dumont, but I fancy he'll be all right."

"He will certainly be all right," Esmée Clapshaw prophesied with confidence.

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